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MEMORIALS OF ST ANDREWS SUNDAYS

BY THE AUTHOR OF
"THE RECREATIONS OF A COUNTRY PARSON"

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I.

THE LIMITS OF FREE THOUGHT IN RELIGION.

"Prove all things: hold fast that which is good."
—1 THESS. v. 21.

IS there any earnest-minded person who can live in these unsettled days, and not sometimes suffer the burden of a great perplexity, as to the fixing of the right and wise limits of what is called Free Thought on religious doctrine? How far is it right for us to use our understanding on that? Under what guidance: on what principle: according to what system: ought we to use our understanding on that? Are there thoughts which we ought to exclude, as touching what we have been taught by our Christian teachers to be the truth of God: exclude, though we can see no logical flaw in them: but exclude, because they would lead us to conclusions which would have shocked our pious fathers;—exclude, because they would land us in a desolate belief that there is nothing stable and certain,—nothing to

be assuredly known? Are there reasons and considerations which, when they are presented to us, we should refuse even to look at, and much more to weigh, and let our mind rest on them? Are there unbelieving thoughts, suggesting themselves perhaps when we are reading our Bibles, or on our knees at prayer, which we ought to regard as temptations: things arising in our minds by the suggestion of some of that great host of unseen spiritual enemies by which we believe that we are compassed about and oftentimes assailed: thoughts not arising through the healthy working of the healthy mind, and with which we are to hold no parley: Or are these thoughts, these reasons and considerations, however directly they may conflict with what we deem our vital beliefs, just the reasonable things which it befits us, as reasonable beings, to look at, to weigh, to be guided by? Are there cases in which the right course, and the safe course, is to shut our eyes, and refuse to see what, if we opened our eyes, we could not help seeing?

The most illustrious of modern perverts to Romanism, at one extremity of the scale, would accept this last course heartily. He would take the perfectly intelligible and consistent position, that we have no right to think for ourselves at all on matters of religious belief. He would save himself the difficult labour of making reservations, exceptions, and limitations on the free exercise of our reason concerning such matters, by telling us that all free thought upon

these is wrong. You must accept the teaching of an infallible authority, and believe it; though you see quite plainly, by the exercise of the faculties God gave you, that it cannot be true. Any consideration that presents itself to your mind, tending to show that the teaching of the church is wrong, is to be regarded as a suggestion of Satan; and is to be put down in the like rough and horror-stricken way in which you would put down an impulse to commit robbery or murder. There is rest for the heart, wearied even to death in the conflict of diverse opinions, in attaining such a position as that. You cannot read that remarkable man's history of his religious beliefs, without seeing plainly that just in despair, in utter weariness of soul, he has clung, as a drowning man, to this spar. You see how, feeling that if he thought at all he would end in Atheism, he has taken refuge in a quiet retreat where they tell him not to think. In the exercise of his private judgment, he has discerned that there is no rest for him, unless in fleeing to where he is forbidden to have any private judgment at all.

And now, whither shall we turn for an example of what may be esteemed as just the opposite pole in the world of thought? Do we not seem to have it in the words of the text? Possibly we cannot find it more clearly and temperately set forth than in the words of a late eminent minister of our church,* who has said, "If God has given us rational faculties, it is

* Dr Robertson of Glasgow Cathedral.

surely His will that we should freely use them, as on other subjects, so on that which is the most important of all. If Christianity is truth, why should it fear the freest investigation?" My friends, with profound respect for the opinion of that wise and good man, I am not able to accept that statement without much restriction. And it is in the hope of being guided to the discernment of what the restrictions are which are needful to make that principle a practically safe one, that I have turned your thoughts at this time to what seems to me a most difficult and perplexing subject.

We have all been taught certain doctrines since our childhood, as indisputably true and certain and vital. These, speaking generally, may be said to be set out in that skeleton of Christian doctrine which is contained in the Confession of Faith, and in that more familiar one of our standards, the Shorter Catechism. It would break the heart of the pious parents of many a young man or woman, to know that he or she had come to doubt any of these vital religious truths. For a long time, people accepted them, without doubt or disquiet. Scepticism and infidelity were for many a day distant things; which Christian folk heard of, as dwellers in a peaceful, well-conducted, and well-to-do country place hear of the crime and misery of some remote great city. Now, they have come near: they are in the midst of us. The air is full of objections, latent or avowed, to the most vital theological truths. You can hardly take up any review, or specially intel-

lectual newspaper such as one or two of those published weekly in London, or scientific report or lecture or book, without finding some of the old doctrines denied, or argued against, or sneered at. The most eminent scientific men, and a large proportion of the most eminent literary men, have to a great degree broken away from such religious teaching as that of the Shorter Catechism. And while so many, in what may without offence be called the world as apart from the church, are ready freely to utter statements and arguments against Christian truth, or what we were taught as children to regard as vital Christian truth; eminent divines are found to speak as if it were a praiseworthy thing to be ready to listen to all that these opponents of Christianity have got to say. A most distinguished dignitary of another church lately mentioned, to the praise of a late distinguished minister, who was a Professor of Theology, that he was "the great advocate of free thought in all directions."* Now, while there is a sense, and a very true one, in which it is to a man's credit that he is ready, in a candid spirit, to listen to the objections which can be stated to even his most cherished beliefs, surely there must be some limit to this. Surely there must be some peaceful middle way, fitted for ordinary Christian people, between that hide-bound imperviousness to all reason, which may be found among Protestants as well as among Romanists; and that forlorn freedom of

* The Dean of Westminster, writing of the late Dr Robert Lee.

thought, which would leave everything open to question,—which cannot say that it is so sure of anything, however sacred and vital, as that its belief is more than provisional and tentative,—a wall that is standing indeed now, but the battering-ram that is to cast it down may come to-morrow.

Let me suggest for your consideration some things which seem worthy to be borne in mind, when we apply our rational faculties to the examination of religious truth: when, desiring (with whatever effort and pain) to carry out the spirit of St Paul's counsel in the text, we set ourselves to estimate the difficulties and objections which in these days are pressed upon us from many quarters.

And first, as to prepossession. An eminent minister of our church has lately added something to the large principle, that we may justly use our rational faculties as freely upon religious truth as upon anything else. He bids us listen in a candid spirit to all that any one has to say against any Christian doctrine that we have been accustomed to hold as vital;—take the inspiration of God's word, for instance;—and not to allow ourselves to have the least bias in favour of any special conclusion. Investigate the evidences of Christianity: apply to these your most remorseless logic: and all this without the slightest wish that you may find Christianity true rather than false. Be quite prepared to accept the conclusion, if your reasons lead

you to it, that our holy faith is all a dismal delusion, that has befooled men for ages. And with the like freedom from previous prepossession, doubtless, it would become us to consider the arguments which might be adduced to prove that this creation never had any Creator; and that this universe gets on somehow by itself, without any Providence to direct it.

No doubt, in ordinary things, the man who investigates any question with a very strong desire that he may find the answer to the question to be Yes, and not No, will readily enough persuade himself that the true answer is Yes. The vanity of convincing a man against his will has passed into a proverb. And yet, it seems to me, that in this case, as in many others, the true course is one to which we are led by something other than logic, and something higher. I cry off from this impartiality: it is something I cannot attain to. There is preliminary reason, as I think, why I should study the evidences of Christianity with a most unspeakable bias. I thank God for each new consideration which proves to me those things are true which my parents taught me as a little child. I acknowledge one restriction, one sweeping restriction, on the practical freedom of free thought in myself. If I listen to the objections of science, of the rationalistic spirit, of the remorseless criticism that reads the Bible like any other book,—all going to prove our Christian faith a fable,—I cannot pretend to do this without bias. I cannot pretend to

give these objections a fair hearing. I scan them, as they are set before me, with the hostile eye that seeks a flaw. I have made up my mind that they must be wrong. For I already know, and am sure, that the very few great verities which make up vital Christianity, are the truth of God: Ruin, Redemption, Regeneration. I will do no more than say, that many human beings have in their own heart and history the irrefragable assurance that these things are true. Now, what kind of hearing would such Christian folk give to any objections? They must divest themselves of the deepest experience of their life: they must cease to be themselves; before they could weigh such, with a steady hand, in an impartial balance. Nor would they admit that in taking this ground, they were going against the spirit of St Paul's counsel in the text. They would say, We have done what the Apostle advises. We *have* proved all things as much as we can ever do that: and now we mean to hold fast that which we have found to be good,—yea, to be best of all!

It is different with the outworks of the citadel: one can take an attack upon these more calmly. Any doctrine, not properly vital, we shall hear what you have to say against. Some good people fall into the error of esteeming as an essential part of the citadel, what is no more than an outwork, and perhaps a distant one. A great lesson which the Christian church has had to learn in the progression of time, has been to withdraw from untenable positions, once deemed

important defences of the central citadel. Once, to say the earth moved round the sun, was judged an attack upon vital Christian truth. And even yet there are good men who do as it were bring the ark of God into the battle, on occasions when there is no need whatsoever for so doing. The Pope declared, a little ago, that whoever spoke against his temporal power did, in so doing, deny the immortality of the soul. And, in precisely the Pope's spirit, there are those who will fight as for vital Christianity, not merely for their own little crotchets in doctrine, but even for their own narrow ideas as to what is becoming in worship. I do not think, however, that almost any of us would experience much practical difficulty in determining for oursélves what we shall hold as the vital essential truths of Christianity. They have already been named :—Ruin by the Fall, Redemption by Christ's life and death, Regeneration by the Holy Spirit. And the practical question is, How shall we treat those sceptical objections to these vital truths, with which the air is now filled?

I have already suggested the inevitable prepossession with which any man who has been early taught Christian doctrines, and who has in some measure experienced their power upon his own heart, must enter on the examination of all objections to them. Would it be unreasonable to go farther, and to suggest such a comparison as this?

If a man came to you, and began by inuendos, and

insinuations, or even by explicit assertions for which he offered proof, to endeavour to destroy your confidence in an old and tried friend; what would you do? Why, I suppose, you would indignantly refuse to listen to that man. You would turn him out. So, I often think, it ought to be with an old tried doctrine; a vital part of our Christian faith. Might we not in such a case say, Now, I shall not listen to anything against THAT. I am sure it is true. I made sure of that, long ago. I have not my proofs at hand, ready for production: but once upon a time I went fully into them, and satisfied myself: and I will not be made restless and unhappy by having my confidence in that old truth assailed and shaken.

I do not say that the right course is the same for every one, here. Doubtless there are those whose vocation it is to face and examine and answer each new objection as it is raised; who have the time, the learning, the training, that are needful; who would shamefully fail of their duty, if they failed to do so. But surely the ordinary believer, who can live by the faith of which he would make but a poor defender, may fitly say that there are truths about which he will not reason, as there are dear friends against whom he will not hear a word.

Let a farther thought be suggested, bearing on the application of our rational faculties to the consideration of religious truth.

It is this: that it is possible for any man to cultivate a sceptical spirit: just as any man may cultivate a grumbling spirit, or a contented and thankful spirit, or a suspicious spirit. By training one's mind to a habit of constantly brooding over our worries, vexations, disappointments: the occasions on which we have been ill-used: the times when less-deserving folk were preferred before us; and failing to look at the other side of the account, the many mercies and blessings God has given us, and our own foolishness, sinfulness, and ill-deserving: we may gradually bring ourselves to a settled temper of discontent, and make our life one long grumble. Perhaps we all know some people who have attained very nearly to this point. You remember how the great dramatist shows us the discrowned king beginning to think of how his children had treated him; and suddenly turning from that track of thought:

> "O, that way madness lies; let me shun that:
> No more of that!"*

Now, is there not a way where unbelief lies? As you could put your mind upon a track of thinking which would lead you to distrust and suspect your best friends, so you may get into the track that will conduct towards disbelieving God's word, or God's existence. You may put yourself under influences that would unsettle all your principles, intellectual, religi-

* King Lear: Act iii.: Scene iv.

ous, moral. And no Christian need be ashamed to say, that we have reason to believe that there is a powerful and subtle Agent always ready to inspire and foster sceptical or blasphemous thoughts.

One thing that powerfully tends to develop a sceptical spirit is, to be surrounded by sceptical associates: to get under the influence of even one powerful mind whose tendency is to discern objections rather than reasons. All this is as it were an unhealthy atmosphere, to be kept out of. Another thing is, much reading of sceptical writings. I suppose there can be no doubt at all, that a long course of sceptical reading, even when we see through each argument as it is presented, and keep our minds in an attitude of protest against the spirit of what we are reading, does us harm. We get tinctured by the moral atmosphere we breathe, in spite of all resolutions to the contrary.

I am sure you know that a great many of the things we read,—books, periodicals, and the like,—affect us not so much by the ideas they convey, as by the general atmosphere with which they surround us. If you read, week by week, a clever, polished, cynical, heartless publication, it will do you harm insensibly: it will mould and colour your ways of thinking and feeling much more than you would believe. You like its talent, you know; but you disapprove, and sometimes very keenly, its general character and tone; and you think you are so on your guard against them, inwardly protesting against them each time you feel

them, that no effect will be produced by them upon you. You are mistaken in thinking so. You breathe and live in a moral atmosphere, which is quite sure to tell upon you; and your moral nature is not (so to speak) ever in an attitude of resistance to the malaria. Then, on the other side, you know that the influence of writings which are not obtrusively instructive, may sink gently into our nature, and do us much good. There is not much formal teaching in them; but as you read them, you feel that you are breathing a general healthy atmosphere. You are aware of a quiet but decided and powerful current, setting towards what is good, magnanimous, and true.

Now, is it not the wiser way to keep out of the unhealthy atmosphere, whether arising from reading or from conversation? Is it not the safe course for most people, not to listen to sceptical reasons and representations, but rather to shut the ears against them? You would not wish that your children should frequent society where they would hear you vilified and abused, even though you knew that you would be able to show them, when they returned from that society, that the abuse and vilification were false and groundless. I do not believe that the text means, that we, ordinary Christian folk, not philosophers, not professed logicians, not fully-equipped defenders of the faith, are to be always ready to listen to attacks upon our holy religion. There are men whose duty it is to listen to these, and answer them. But the

common run of believing people may most fitly say, We are obeying St Paul's admonition in the text; we are fully carrying out its spirit; we have done the proving already; we have proof in ourselves, in our own heart and history, of the truth of those vital truths we have been taught: and now it remains that we hold fast that which is good; and that we keep away from influences which would tend to make us let it go.

There is nothing unworthy in the Christian, who has the evidence in himself that our blessed faith is true—nothing unworthy in his saying,—No, I will not go to hear such an unbeliever lecture: I will not read such an infidel book: I will not go and listen to such a sceptic's talk. I know it is possible to state in a few minutes, in a single sentence, difficulties which it would take long time and much ingenuity to explain: I know it is possible for a clever man to make the worse appear the better reason: I know the case is common of plain sagacious people whose conclusions are right, but whose reasons would very likely be wrong; and that the best cause might be spoiled by bad management of it: Wherefore, I shall keep out of harm's way.

Let it be said, that further risks attend the growth of the sceptical spirit. It is unquestionable that in some cases the spirit which begins with the honest purpose of candidly listening to what there is to be said against accepted religious beliefs, passes into a

sneering spirit. *That* is always and in every way bad. Farther, one may come to have a morbid liking for daring thought,—like a schoolboy's pride in proposing some specially dangerous or mischievous enterprise. One may get that morbid disposition to say things that reflect upon the doings and character of Almighty God.* To some minds there is a strange charm about tampering with the forbidden, and treading on dangerous ground. There are men who like to think they are saying things which would shock the prejudices of good old-fashioned people,—possibly even their own of a few years back: who like to think they are breaking the trammels of early training. Surely this is something to be put down. And beyond this, a conceited spirit, subordinating everything to its own judgment, is a bad thing: and not likely to lead to truth. We are to remember that, after all, our intellect is a warped and imperfect instrument: it has shared the Fall which (wherever originating) has beyond a doubt passed upon our whole nature. And however hard it may be to trace the rationale of the fact, it is a most certain fact, that an honest heart, a humble and reverent spirit, and a pure life, are essential aids to the intellect's discernment of truth and error in any large and complicated question. Probably our understanding sees as plainly as an angel's could, that two and two make

* I could easily adduce striking instances. But I shall not do the reader the unkindness of suggesting to him what he would not easily forget.

four; but when we come to large questions of life, of politics, of religion, *then* the machine breaks down,—or rather, does its work in a lame way: *then* the sorrowful twist, explain its origin as you may, becomes most manifest.

I have sought, my friends, in what has been said, to set forth counsels which, in these present days, may be practically useful to average Christian people. There are exceptional minds, placed in exceptional circumstances, and called to fulfil exceptional duties, to which these counsels do not apply. As a physician, looking for the protection of God's kind providence in his noble vocation, may without rashness go where he must be exposed to infection to which *we* could not expose ourselves without the most culpable rashness; doubtless there are those among us, so gifted, and so called, that it is their duty to breathe, as it were, the enchanted air that is heavy with poison; to run the spiritual risks that attend familiarity with the thoughts and reasonings of the most subtle enemies of our most holy faith, to the end that they may answer and baffle these: and in that work, done for our advantage, such good and able men may humbly look for His guidance and protection, who has promised to keep His people in all the way which He appoints them. But to such work and such risk the great mass of believing people are not called. Strong in the assurance they have in their own heart, in the history of their own conversion to God and daily walk with

Him, of the truth of the religion by which they live, they may fitly and reasonably say, that the time is past for inquiries going to the truth or falsehood of the vital doctrines of Christianity: that they have, in the full sense of St Paul's words, "proved all things," and that this day's duty is to "hold fast that which is good." And while seeing plainly that minds vary so much, that it does not by any means follow that what is the healthy discipline for most, is the healthy discipline for all, I yet venture with some confidence to think that for the average understanding, the safe thing is something far indeed from the Roman refusal to reason on religious truth at all; but somewhat apart too, from the ultra-Protestant licence to use our reason as freely on religious truth, on God's dealings and ways, on God's teaching, as on anything else. Surely we can discern infirmities about our reason, and dangers arising in the exercise of it, which may well lead us to set some restriction to this liberty, plausibly as the mention of it sounds. It is not that we doubt the truth we have been taught; but we doubt the full competence of the instrument by which we would note and estimate it.

But is there such a rare attainment possible, as the combination of the freest sweep of the speculative intellect with the simplest faith? I have heard one very competent to observe, say that these things existed together in the case of that good man, too soon taken from us, to whom the Church owes its Endow-

ment Scheme.* His mind was daringly speculative: in his talk with intimate friends he freely handled the gravest topics, and suggested the most startling difficulties: but when it came to his own personal relation to his Saviour, he was able to cast all these aside, and to come to the throne of grace with the faith of a little child. God grant each of us, my friends, of His Spirit's working in us, to attain to something of that! And so, though in these unquiet days, our minds must perforce grow familiar with many thoughts that never disquieted our Christian fathers because they never knew them, yet in the inner recesses of our heart, and in our deepest spiritual experience, we shall be free from all carefulness as to these. Not that our faith, after toil and storm, has reached a purer air: but that the simple faith of early days has remained unsophisticated by advancing time and knowledge; that we look for mercy through Christ, simply as though we never had heard of conflicting theories as to His atoning Sacrifice:—and go to God's footstool morning, evening and at all times, naturally as though we never had read ingenious and most woful arguments, meant to prove that there is no power in prayer.

Now to Him that is of power to stablish you according to His gospel, and the preaching of Jesus Christ: To God only wise, be glory through Jesus Christ for ever. Amen.

* Professor Robertson of Edinburgh.

II.

INFERIOR EXPEDIENTS.

"And King Ahaz took down the sea from off the brasen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones." —2 KINGS xvi. 17.

I HAVE always felt, in hearing this little passage of scripture read, that it was very suggestive: and suggestive of things very touching and of things very instructive. There is pathos, there is warning, in this type of all Inferior Expedients.

Long ago, King Solomon, the wise and magnificent, had caused this sea to be made. Doubtless it was a wonder of bigness, of ingenuity and beauty. It stood upon twelve oxen, fashioned of brass; and it contained a vast quantity of water for use in the temple services. Solomon, with his wisdom and his magnificent ideas, was gone, and had left his great sea behind him: as men have died and left the results of their labour and ingenuity to successors who did not greatly care for them, ever since the world began. So each of us will some day leave behind us our books, and the chair in which we sit, and all our little belongings, to look strange (as we fancy) in the possession of other people.

Ahaz now reigned over Judah and Jerusalem: a weak and wicked king. Things went fast downhill under his rule. Solomon's beautiful temple was despoiled in a way that would have made Solomon's heart sore: and the gold and silver vessels and ornaments that still remained about it were taken and turned to the king's own purposes. And among other expedients for getting a little money, or what might fetch money, King Ahaz thought of Solomon's old sea. He "took down the sea from the brasen oxen that were under it, and put it upon a pavement of stones." We do not know if the poor wretch had heart or head enough left to mind much about this decided step downhill. If he had, it would doubtless cost a pang to take it; and to be aware, as he would be aware without being told, of what would be said by those around concerning the whole thing. But then he would try to persuade himself that the stone pavement was really as good as the brasen oxen after all: and then there was the brass of the old oxen to turn to new account.

I said the little story suggested some thoughts that are very touching. It is a sad thing to be driven to inferior expedients; to be obliged to make up our mind that it is not with us as it used to be; and that in bodily health, or mental vigour, or worldly circumstances, we are not the people we were, and must do with inferior things. Every step downhill is a pang: there is no disguising that. But I said too, that the text had a suggestion of serious warning. There

is something worthy of all respect, and all sympathy, in the sight of any human being honestly trying to come down frankly to humbler views of himself, humbler aspirations and hopes; honestly trying to make the best of reduced circumstances. But it is not *that* we have before us now. Here we have the king, for his own unworthy ends, abating the dignity of the old historic sea, that had come down to him from a worthier predecessor. And even so, my friends, we lower our standard in many ways; we take to inferior expedients, and try to persuade ourselves that they may do. I believe, most firmly, that as we go on through life, this is our great spiritual temptation: to do something perfectly analogous to that unworthy doing of King Ahaz. We allow ourselves to think that less may do: less prayer, less watchfulness, less trouble: less diligent use of all the means of grace: and then we backslide; we fall away from grace; our heart gets hard and worldly; we come to be little impressed by spiritual things; we get far away from Christ, far away from God; anything in us that could be called spirituality seems nearly dead. We begin by thinking that less reading of the Bible may do: we know it all so well already: why keep going over and over again sentences which are perfectly familiar—which we could repeat almost without misplacing a word? Then we make our prayers very short: always shorter: very short in our closet, alone with our Father who seeth in secret;

very perfunctory and heartless in the family, assembled morning and evening: we grow great advocates for extremely short prayers in the congregation, gathered in God's house on Sunday. We turn impatient of any service in church unless it be a very short one; and we plead for short services in church by arguments which, if fairly carried out, would lead to no services at all. We come to think there is no good in going to church more than once on the Lord's day; and as for week-day services, we see no need for *them* at all. We go on to think that there is no use in being so particular about keeping holy God's day as we used to be; no good in making so sharp a distinction between its engagements and the engagements of other days; no reality in what we are told about good men finding that blessed day worthily spent cast a blessing over all the week. We begin to doubt the advantage of aiming at the higher degrees of spirituality in which the young convert eagerly believes he is to be kept up through all life; not knowing how long, and how wearing, a thing life is. We do not care, as we once did, about prolonged and careful preparation before going to the sacrament of the Lord's Supper; we think we used to be too precise in that matter; superstitiously so. I mention these things merely as instances, which may serve to recall many more to your minds; instances in which we come down to a lower level, in a fashion that ought to be very carefully looked into lest it prove to

be a wrong and harmful fashion. These are the ways in which we do, as it were, take down the sea from the brasen oxen, and put it upon a pavement of stones.

My friends, it is very good and right, in some things, thus to come down to a humbler level. It is very good and right to accommodate our minds to reduced circumstances, and make the best of them. It is well, for instance, to make up our minds that we are getting on through life; that we are turning old; that the activity and lightheartedness of earlier days are gone; that infirmities are stealing over us; that our worldly hopes and expectations have in great measure failed; perhaps that in worldly wealth and position sad reverses have come: it is a noble thing and a heroic thing, by God's grace to make up our mind to things like these. But never let us, as concerns our spiritual life, allow inferior expedients: never let us make up our mind to come a little way downhill as regards the care of our immortal souls. For to do *that* is to backslide from God; *that* is to fall away from grace: that is the spiritual declension which is just the very worst sign of how we stand with God. For continuance is the great test of the reality of our religious profession and religious feeling: there is no worse symptom that there was something wrong about everything we thought most right in us, than that our goodness should prove like the morning cloud and the early dew, which soon pass away. Now, hear me

when I tell you, my friends, that we must never make up our mind to be less careful about our spiritual well-being: to try less diligently to live near God: to allow our heart to be a little more under the influence of the things of time and sense. Yet this is our daily temptation. This is our great temptation. It is here, perhaps, that average Christian people run their greatest risk: surely it is true to the experience of many men and women, that this is the sin that doth most easily beset them. We think less will do: less care and pains for God's service and our soul's good: and as the fire and enthusiasm of youth abate, —as the edge of our first holy resolutions gets blunted, and the liveliness of our first religious feelings gets chilled, and all divine truths cease through long use to strike us as they would strike a stranger; we grow more and more ready to yield to this: we give in to the ruinous fancy, that once we made too much work about the title to heaven and the fitness for it, and that less is quite enough: less than that old anxious labour will surely do. May God, of his great grace, keep us from this sin and folly! "Oh for a closer walk with God!" should be our heart's desire: save us from the languid acquiescence in a course of life and feeling always getting farther away from our Saviour! For then the old happiness and peace in believing will gradually but surely go. The Holy Spirit will withdraw His calming, cheering, elevating, sanctifying influences, from the heart that values them

so little, leaving often a miserable hardness and deadness of soul. Old sinful dispositions, which you thought had been rooted out and done with, will gain force again, God knows to what sad and humbling result. And a dismal spirit of unbelief, sometimes carping at even the most vital truths and shaking your real hold of them, will insinuate itself, to your great loss and dispeace and desolation. All these things will most assuredly follow from our doing anything like what Ahaz did in the matter of Solomon's great sea: from our doing anything like making up our mind that our soul's welfare, and our duty to our Saviour, must do with less care and pains in days coming than they have had in days past.

And now, my friends, I wish that we might have some further serious thought about all this. Come and let us think of some particular things, in regard to which we are perhaps following Ahaz's bad example of having recourse to Inferior Expedients.

And one, I cannot help sometimes thinking, is our use of the Lord's day. I suppose there can be no doubt, in the mind of enlightened people, that formerly in Scotland the keeping holy of the Christian Sabbath was a matter in regard to which too strict and severe ideas, savouring much more of the Jewish letter than of the Christian spirit, were entertained by many pious men and women. And much evil came of the general acceptance of these severe ideas of what it is that is

meant by duly hallowing the Lord's day. For very many, young and likewise older, finding by experience that it was quite impossible for them to spend the day in the manner in which they believed it ought to be spent, in the constantly keeping the mind bent upon spiritual things to the utter exclusion of any worldly thought or care or word, and all this with the sense that it was an enjoyment and a privilege to keep the mind so bent, suffered great remorse of conscience for which there was no need at all; and sometimes broke loose from the unreasonable restraints which galled them, into a temper of spiritual recklessness. But if formerly too tight ideas about the Lord's day and its Christian observance prevailed among professing Christians, I fear that much too loose ideas are now taking their place. I believe that there is no more becoming way of spending some part of the holy day, than in a quiet walk: a walk which parents and children can enjoy together as probably they have not the chance of doing upon any other day of the week: and (let me repeat) a *quiet* walk, without noise or levity; and at such a season of the day as shall neither interfere with attendance at church nor with the duty due to the family at home. But is there not a risk in these times of obliterating the special character of the day: of making it, as regards walking, as regards reading, as regards letter-writing, as regards conversation, too much like any other day? Ah, brethren, we are getting to take down the sea from the old dignified

and costly elevation, and to set it on the coarse pavement of stones!

My friends, I venture to dictate to no man's conscience. I do not take it upon me to say how far this freer use of the Lord's day is wrong. Upon the question of what is meant by the spiritual observance of Sunday, very wise and good people are now divided; and each, as concerns his own behaviour, must be fully persuaded in his own mind. I dare not say that the man who allows himself free access to secular reading on the Lord's day is guilty of sin in so doing; nor the man who as regards other things allows himself a freedom which would have greatly shocked our fathers, and even ourselves a few years ago. But I can say, with perfect confidence, that the Christian who so acts, does what is very harmful for the health both of his body and his soul. He fritters away the use of a most precious means of grace, who suffers the thoughts, the feelings, the engagements of the Lord's day to be just like those of common days! Oh brethren, we are careful and troubled enough about many things during the working days of the week: let there be one day on which specially to remember that one thing is needful! We need that sacred elevation, that calm retreat; by God's kind grace we will not let worldly cares and thoughts intrude upon it. The world is very much with us, and keeps gaining very much upon us, from Monday morning till Saturday night: oh let us be in the Spirit on the Lord's day! So shall the rust of

worldliness be rubbed off; and the irritations, the little humbling failures of temper and of judgment, the never-ceasing worry and flutter, be risen above; so shall brain and heart and nervous system profit, as really as faith and hope and charity and all kindly Christian grace. After we have done our very best to hallow and improve the day, we shall many times have to lament that we have not made more of it. There will be only too much of secular thought and talk upon it, do all we can. But in Christian prudence: in respect to our great rest and advantage, both in body and soul; let us determine that we shall not of set purpose treat God's day as Ahaz did Solomon's sea; take it down from the old elevation on which wiser and better men were fully assured that God's Word placed it; and set it on a lower level and in a meaner place!

I have already named prayer as a means of grace, in regard to which we are tempted in these days with this same temptation of which we have been thinking. The like may be said as to the whole worship of God. The days have been, no doubt, in which God's worship, both in public and private, was unduly long; was so lengthened out that it must have been an inexpressible weariness to many. I speak, of course, of our own country. Now, I think there can be no doubt that our constitution, both in body and mind, is less robust than that of our fathers. We cannot do so much, and we cannot stand so much, as they could.

Services prolonged to a degree which would utterly exhaust and irritate us, proved interesting and profitable to them. Those long communion services, which we are now ready to think a weariness, and greatly to abridge, used to be a great deal longer even within my remembrance: yet, so far from being felt as a weariness, they were esteemed as a great privilege and blessing, by multitudes of very good and devout people. We hear with wonder, now-a-days, of that worship, lasting over many hours. We feel that it would not profit *us*; but let us beware of therefore concluding that it did not profit *them*. Assuredly it did. But apart from the question of our not being physically and mentally able to bear long services, long prayers and long sermons, may there not be some want of heart at the bottom of the change? Even yet, we are able, both men and women, to spend a long time without weariness in engagements we really care for. Our hours of work are very long; specially of head-work. A man will sit at his desk for many hours, with his mind on the stretch. We are able to read light books, or even heavy books if not religious, for hours together, without the least flagging of interest. Our amusements sometimes last for a good many hours. Young women, not of robust frame, are able to go through severe exercise in a heated atmosphere for a great part of the night, without complaint. No, we are not so weak, after all. We do not get tired so soon, after all; if it is a thing we care for. Yet we

get tired very soon, now, of the worship of God. There is a craving, in many quarters, that the public services of religion be short, be very short. The prayers must be short; the sermon must be short. Does not this look as if people cared but little for them? Ah, my friends, if our whole heart were in God's worship as it ought, we should not find it a weariness.

Of course I know quite well, that the reason often assigned by cultivated people why they find the service of God's house wearisome, is, that the service is so ill done; so unworthy of God's house and worship. We are told that in this country both prayers and sermons are often bad: the work is done by men of inferior ability and defective training. And there can be no doubt at all that in these days, there is not the difference, intellectually or spiritually, between the preacher and the hearer, which once used to be. Once, the preacher was a man incomparably more learned and cultivated than the mass of the congregation. Now, that is not so. In very many churches, a great part of the congregation consists of persons who in mental cultivation, and in things much more important, are at least equal to the preacher; sometimes very superior to him. And it is certain enough that there is no kind of composition which is commonly produced by persons so ill-qualified to produce it, as a sermon. It is quite certain that if an article in a newspaper, or a paper in a magazine or review, were

as wearisome, and as devoid of all ability, as many sermons are, nobody would read it. No doubt, too, prayer, in our churches, is often very unworthy; and praise really distressing to hear. Well, let me say to those who plead these hindrances to their enjoyment of public worship,—which I admit exist,—How about your private devotions? *There* you have no hindrance but what arises from yourself. *There*, at least, there is nothing to come between you and your Saviour. Well, is it heartier there? Do you feel real rest and comfort and enjoyment there? Are you able, there, to truly pour out your heart to God? If you cut short your private prayers, it must just be because you feel so little interest in them. If you care little for reading God's Word there, it must be your own fault. If God's worship be a weariness in your closet, and a thing you are glad to escape from, it is very plain why you do not care for it in God's house. All the hindrances of which you complain may exist there; but assuredly the great hindrance is in the undevout and prayerless spirit, that would rather get away from God!

Let it be understood, brethren, that I do not find fault with the reduction of our worship within reasonable limits. I do believe that in these days, we are not able to bear either long sermons or long prayers. These have ceased to be profitable; and the most honest endeavours upon our part will not make them so. Only let us see to it, that in our shortened

devotions, our briefer reading in our Bibles, our abridged hours in the house of prayer, we be not just giving in to a sinful and miserable lack of interest and heart in the whole matter; and so following in the steps of Ahaz, the weak and wicked Jewish king.

And thus speaking of the use of the means of grace, let me just name another, which I fear has almost fallen into disuse with many Christian people; I mean Self-Examination. Probably this has sometimes been carried to a morbid extreme. It is not good to be always watching and registering the rise and fall of feeling in our hearts, as you might watch the weather-glass: any more than it would be good to be always feeling your pulse and wondering if anything is wrong with your bodily frame. It is hard, even, in these over-driven times, at the end of the wearied day, to do like him in the middle ages, who "summed the actions of the day, Each night before he slept." But surely there is too little now, of that serious introspection, which might hinder our going on in ignorance of our true spiritual state; like him of old of whom it was said by Hosea, "Gray hairs are here and there upon him, yet he knoweth not." Even before the communion-season, when there used to be so much of it, I fear we have all greatly abated the old zeal and care.

Then at communion-seasons, we are ready, in these days, to have far less heart and enjoyment and devout feeling than there used to be; and to be con-

tented to have less. It is a re-action, doubtless, from a great extreme: for we in Scotland, holding what some would call low views as to the nature of the sacrament, yet did practically regard it with a reverence not unmingled with superstition; but a reverence greater than is found in any other land of Christendom. Now, there is a tendency to bring the ordinance down, like Solomon's sea. You hear good people find fault with the old name of *a day of High Communion:* saying that we ought to be always ready to remember our Saviour, and shew forth His death and by faith feed upon Him: saying that we have no right to set the quiet Feast, which the Church in other days celebrated on every Lord's day, upon any mysterious elevation. And all this is true to some extent: most errors are the exaggeration of truths. Yet let us beware of anything like stripping the most solemn of Christian services of any solemnity that is of right its due. The communion season ought to be a specially solemn one: carefully prepared for, reverently waited upon: the subject of many serious thoughts, and many prayers. It may well be a time of deep feeling, even in the heart sobered by advancing years. And should it not be so, it will not do to hide the cause, in our own want of devout preparation and due care, under the pretext that any special feeling was not needed nor expected.

There is but one more respect now to be mentioned, in which we are perhaps letting our standard

too much down from the old way. Once, Christian people did really try, hard and constantly, to live under the influence of the world to come: and, so doing, they did perhaps depreciate this life, and its duties,—unduly depreciated this world, and all its enjoyments and concerns. Have we not now some tendency to run to the opposite extreme? Now it is the fashion in thought to say that this life is an end, not merely a means: that the great vocation of our religion meanwhile is to hallow our daily life: that our calling is to do common things on Christian principle: that to work is to pray: that this life is not just the passage to another, but something worth thought for itself. Brethren, all this is most true: but there is danger lest we push it too far. We must not let ourselves be worked and worried out of all spirituality: and this is the risk now. The edge of religious vitality gets rubbed away. There is not the eager choice of Christ and Eternity that used to be. We think to turn the flank of this world; forgetting that it is a spiritual enemy, to be overcome by faith. A great deal of this present talk about labour being prayer, is a pretext for much worldliness. The real heart is in the things of time and sense. The eye stops on them, instead of looking beyond them. There are fashions of religious thinking, just as there are fashions in dress and in amusements; and our fashion now is to go to the other extreme from the monastic idea of a Christian life. Either idea was

good so far: each is bad in its extreme form. A life of engrossing worldly bustle is quite as far from our Redeemer's outline of a holy life, as is the life of the convent cell. And the true thing doubtless is, that we give ourselves to our worldly work and duty; but have our treasure laid up in heaven through it all. See that we be not led, by any fancy of liberal and advanced views, fit for a practical age, to subordinate *that* great truth: for most certain it is, after all, that to us, who must live for ever,

> "All, all on earth is shadow; all beyond
> Is substance: the reverse is folly's creed."

I have thus suggested to you, my friends, some thoughts of warning, for which I have to thank that short story of a doing of King Ahaz, which he did two thousand and six hundred years ago. He took down King Solomon's sea, and put it on a reduced footing: and just that self-same thing, it seems to me, we are greatly tempted in these days to do, as concerning the means of grace and the preparation for a better world. I have wished to say all this, humbly: and now I leave it for your own serious reflection. Of details there may be doubt: but there can be no doubt at all that it is unwise and wrong to come down to a lower level of spirituality, and care for our souls, and diligence in using means which conduce to their good. Let us rather err, if we err at all, on the side of overcare and

caution. And let us ask One, who is by far the wisest and best Adviser, to shew us what we ought to do whenever we are perplexed: let us ask the Blessed and Holy Spirit to guide and counsel us: and let us thankfully yield ourselves to His guidance, though it may lead to what we should not choose. The most favourite prejudice, the dearest idol, we shall cast away at His bidding; whenever *that* is made plain. And so, though go downhill we must, in many ways, as we go on: in bodily strength, in hopeful light-heartedness, in interest in this life and its ways; we never shall turn to Inferior Expedients, as concerns the care of our salvation: as concerns the love of our Saviour: as concerns our faith and duty towards Him!

III.

A GREAT REQUEST

"That I may know Him, and the power of His resurrection, and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made comformable unto His death."—PHILIPP. iii. 10.

THERE are human beings, there are men and women, your acquaintance with whom appreciably affects all your life. You feel that you are not the same, for knowing one of these, as you would have been if you had not known them. They are not, of necessity, the cleverest people you have known; nor the most powerful; nor the best informed. It is not that they have told you things of which otherwise you would have been ignorant; nor that they have helped you to things you wished to get. But to know them had its effect on all your views: it quickened you in many ways: it gave you an impulse towards what is high-minded, kind, and good; it made you earnest, patient, resigned, hard-working, hopeful. People felt the thing I mean, who knew Dr Arnold. People have felt it, who know a certain kindly philanthropist, unrivalled in sway over many *English Hearts*. And looking back on the way they have come through life, and

the influences that fashioned their character, there are those who have said of some one they have known, "All that good I got, because I came to know *him.*"

But the unnamed One of whom my text speaks: He whom St Paul so desired to know; how shall we worthily speak of Him, "Whom to know is life eternal?" We are not careful to say who He is. There is a Name, more conspicuous by its absence, more emphatic because it is not said or written, that the text recalls to all Christian minds and hearts. How the world has changed to us since we came to know *Him!* All the thoughts, affections, purposes of our nature, are changed, are affected, are leavened through and through, by the knowledge of Him. We cannot imagine, now, what we should have thought, what we should have been, had we not known Him! To have known Him even in the lower sense of having heard of Him and learned about Him,—been made acquainted with His nature, His character, His work, His teaching,—even *that* casts a new light upon life and death, upon this world and the next, upon time and eternity. To have known Him in a higher sense of that word, known Him savingly, known Him as we humbly trust through grace we have been brought in some measure to know Him,—why, "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent!" And as for the change *that* works on ourselves and all things round us, why, "If any man be in Christ, he

is a new creature: old things are passed away: behold, all things are become new." O brethren, how great, how comprehensive, how sublime then, the wish of the great apostle, which we may fitly take this day for our own; "That I may know Him; and the power of His resurrection; and the fellowship of His sufferings; being made comformable unto His death!"

Let us pray, my friends, that the Blessed and Holy Spirit, who inspired these words of St Paul, may help us at this time rightly to understand them. May He show us clearly what His mind and teaching in them are; and enable us to lay these to our heart sincerely.

It was no wonder that St Paul so earnestly wished that He might know his Saviour. You have seen what wonderful efficacy the Saviour Himself ascribes to the true knowledge of Him. And doubtless, to know the Redeemer in any good degree, implies that we know many things; and have done some of the most important and momentous things that human beings can ever do. To know our Saviour, to know Him savingly, implies that we know ourselves; our natural sinfulness and loss; our helplessness to help others; and His all-sufficiency to save. It implies that we have gone to Him, though feebly, slowly, and reluctantly perhaps; that we at last opened the door to Him who had stood there and knocked long: that we entrusted our souls to His keeping: cast ourselves upon Him, believed on Him, found rest in Him, peace

and pardon, infinite compassion, perfect sympathy, all-sufficient grace. You remember how earnestly St Paul bowed his knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, asking for some, very dear to him, that they might be able to comprehend the breadth and length and depth and height, and to know the love of Christ. Pray that we may thus know our Saviour: thus know, realise, get a clear view of it,—not in a theological system, but in plain, certain fact,—the loving heart of our Saviour; the immensity of redeeming love, that in sober earnest, would not have one immortal being perish, but all repent, believe, and live!

Now St Paul tells us in the text that he, first, wanted this general knowledge. He desired that he might know Christ; and thus know and do all these things which you have seen come with that knowledge. *That* is plain: we must give more thought to the details which follow. Besides the general knowledge, the saving knowledge, of his Redeemer, there were special things about our Lord which St Paul had an earnest desire that he might know. And he tells us, you see, that he wished that he might know our Lord, and the power of His resurrection. Now, what exactly does that mean?

He seems to wish, the apostle seems to wish, that he might understand, and more than understand, experience in himself, the influence which the fact that Christ rose again from the dead ought to have on the mind. There is an inexpressible power in His resur-

rection, when we realise it and bring it home to us. Oh how it brings immortality to light: what a solidity it gives to the unseen world: how it sustains when those dearest to us die: how it assures us that "through the grave, and gate of death, we shall pass to our joyful resurrection!" Think, my friends, of the power of that great fact, that One who bore our nature, very man as truly as very God, died and rose again: entered that undiscovered country from whose bourne no traveller returns,—and *did* return;—re-crossed the threshold which they who cross once, cross no more,—proved, by actual trial, that death is not extinction, though it looks so very like it! Let me ask you a question, which most of us could answer. Have you sat beside the dead, the beloved dead; have you looked on the changed face, going back to clay; and have you not known, if only for a moment, the rising within you of the dark and awful doubt: Now I am not sure,—not sure but what it is all over: not sure if life is ever to waken up again in this body from which it is meantime fled: not sure but what it is all gone out for ever,—and one, once filled with many cares, ceased to be care-worn because turned to nothing: one, that once loved us so much, gone like the fading leaves and flowers that return no more, though others like them may! Oh, dead mother, heedless while your children weep around you: Oh, smiling little infant face, now left in the darkened room alone: have we seen the last of you? Are you

gone out for ever? Truly you look like it meanwhile! There is not a more hopeless sight, than the sight of death, when you look at it as it looks to mere sense and reason. But then "the power of His resurrection" comes in and cheers! The dismal doubt, the despairing doubt, goes; and a light is cast on the whole unseen country beyond the grave! A voice we can trust with our whole heart tells us of immortality, and because He rose, we *shall* also rise. True it is, every thing turns on His resurrection. "If Christ be not risen, your faith is vain, ye are yet in your sins: then they also that are fallen asleep in Christ are perished. But now is Christ risen from the dead, and become the first fruits of them that slept. For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ shall all be made alive." Tell me not of a mere dogma, all well enough in the Bible and in theological systems; but nothing in the heart and life of men. It is a real and mighty power, the power of His resurrection! It concerns every one; every one who has laid a dear friend in the grave; every one who will some day lie down in the grave himself. It has taken the sting from death, and the victory from the grave. We are not afraid of the last enemy now: it is not the hopeless thing it used to be. Call it rather the last friend: the messenger of peace, that opens the gloomy gate of the glorious Golden City: the kindly sleep, which the kind Saviour gives to His beloved; calming the unquiet heart to dreamless rest, closing the wearied

eyes on time that they may open freshly on eternity. Oh brethren, pray this day with St Paul, that in this world of many graves, we may "know Him, and the power of His resurrection!"

I look at that hand, the faithful, hard-working servant of many years: I think how it shall go down to dust—how the blood will stop, and the sinews moulder: I shall have it again some day;—I know *that* because Jesus died and rose. Think you, my friends, of the kindest faces you ever knew, not seen for long; of little ones missed from your fireside; of the touch of vanished hands, and the sound of voices long silent here: and remember that if you hope to meet these again, it is because Jesus died and rose. Go to the quiet resting place, where those you knew first sleep; and remember, standing there, that it is because our Redeemer died and rose, that they do but sleep calmly for the Great Awaking. And seeing thus a little part of its mighty power, pray for the full knowledge of it: pray earnestly like St Paul, that you "may know Him, and the power of His resurrection!"

I am not sure, that in what has now been said, I have given you the whole of what the great apostle meant when he said he wished to know the power of Christ's resurrection. I *am* sure, that he meant all that I have said, at least: perhaps he had more in his mind. There is a knowledge of the power of Christ's resur-

rection, which is expressed in turning from all unrighteousness: St Paul thought of *that* probably when he wrote to the Romans, "that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life." But anything like a complete setting-out of the full meaning of my text, would demand a volume, and not a small one: all we can do just now is to try if we may catch leading ideas, salient points, fitted for profit and counsel in a short half-hour's meditation. So let us go on to think how St Paul expressed a wish more difficult for us to sympathise with than the one of which we have thought, in either of the meanings of it suggested. He wished that he might know his Saviour, "and the fellowship of His sufferings." And what do you say to that? Oh brethren, dare we offer *that* prayer?

"A man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief:" the great solitary Sufferer of humanity: dare we put forth a hardy hand, and ask to share His awful crown? We on whom our little worries often lie so heavy, and our little pains: we, a race with hearts that have sometimes broken, with faces that have often been early lined with care? Have the sorrows of a sorrowful world not been heavy enough on us, that we want more! Shall we ask to put out on the awful ocean of unknown wofulness, and fathom nameless depths and explore unutterable pangs! Well, St Paul says,—there is not the least doubt of *that*,—that he wished to

suffer as his Saviour suffered. "That I may know Him, and the fellowship of His sufferings." He said, elsewhere, that he desired "to fill up that which was behind, of the afflictions of Christ." Nor was this way of thinking peculiar to St Paul. St Peter wrote, to all Christian people, "Rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of the sufferings of Christ."

Now St Peter and St Paul did not like suffering for suffering's sake, any more than we. And when St Paul wished that he might suffer as his Master suffered, doubtless it was because in partaking of Christ's sufferings, he would get great good, to be got in no other way. And this, for two reasons easily thought of. For one thing, the wise and good man knew, that the very best, noblest, kindest, sweetest, that is in human nature or that can be got out of it, —the most heavenly character and dispositions,—the things that make man or woman look but a very little lower than the angels,—are brought out by sanctified sorrow, as never by anything else. And for another thing, he knew who knew human nature so well, that there is nothing that draws so close together, as the great tie of common suffering,—suffering which people have with a patient mind endured together: and thus that there was something in the "fellowship of His sufferings," that would seem to unite him very nearly with his Lord, by the bond of a brotherly sympathy. Not the fellowship of the perfect peace of perfect faith: not the fellowship of the Beatific Vision in

glory: could (while we remain what we are) draw together like the brotherhood of grief. And St Paul could better understand his Saviour's nature, could get glimpses of His sorrowful and kindly heart, through the experience of sorrow in his own, as he could in no other way. Thus you may see, how, beyond the mere general feeling that where Christ's steps had been, Paul was content that his should be; that whatever his Lord had gone through, was good enough for him;—there was special reason why the apostle should ask, that he might know his Saviour, "and the fellowship of His sufferings."

My friends, the saint and martyr must have been very sure of one thing, before he offered that prayer. Before he ventured thus to ask that he might be visited with that awful and perilous discipline of suffering, he must have been very sure that the Blessed Sanctifier and Comforter, the Holy Ghost Himself, would never fail him, not for an hour, while sorrow should last! Oh the fearful risk of great suffering; in itself, unsanctified from above, just as likely to harden and embitter the heart, as to hallow it! I tell you I dare not follow St Paul in this part of his prayer. Not for us to seek, but for God to send if he sees right, is sorrow now! You do not know what you are asking for, if you ask for the fellowship of Christ's sufferings. If *that* were granted you, you might feel an iron hand laid on you that you did not expect, a mountainous weight laid on you that

would crush you! We dare to ask no more as touching this precious but awful discipline of great grief, than that God may send us only what He knows we need; and with *that*, in tenfold measure, His Blessed and Holy Spirit!

Let us pass to the closing request in the apostle's prayer. All these things he desired might come to him, he "being made conformable unto Christ's death."

"Being made conformable unto His death." And now, what shall we say to this? Do you not feel as if here, too, St Paul has left the average Christian far behind him; and gone on into a realm into which only a sainted apostle could go? For Paul does not say if it should prove needful, if it so proved that there was no help for it, he would try, as well as he could by God's grace, to submit to a like death to that his Master died. He says that he really wished it, and asked for it as a precious boon, that he might be "made conformable unto His death."

There can be no doubt, not the least, what the great apostle meant. He seems to be lifted above himself, as he goes on through that grand chapter we know. Not even he would be always up to the pitch of full sympathy with what he says here. This is the climax of what he has said as to fellowship in Christ's sufferings. The last and worst of our Lord's sufferings were in His death. And in this too, St Paul desired to be

made like his Saviour. The plain meaning of his words is, that he would be thankful if, being supported through it all by his Lord's presence and the Blessed Spirit, he were appointed to die by just such a cruel death as Christ died!

"Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his:" it was a bad man that said *that*, who came to a bad end: but many a good Christian has made that prayer his own. "Send me a quiet departure from this world, without fear and (if it please Thee) without pain:" *that* was the prayer of one of the best of men:* and how often the like prayer has been sent up by like people! We do not ask,—we cannot pretend to do it,—that we may die on the torturing cross, abandoned by all: Rather on our quiet bed, with mind composed and calm, with loving faces dimly seen through the mists of death, and kind hands to close our eyes when they see no more. Not literally, not materially, do we poor weak creatures dare to pray that we may be "made conformable unto His death." We leave *that* to martyred saints at whose feet we shall be content to sit in glory. Yea rather, we leave it to those to whom the Master appointed it: knowing that where He appoints it, the grace shall be as the day.

But there is another conformity to our Redeemer's death, which was not absent from His apostle's mind;

* Bishop Andrewes.

and which is more like us. We are made conformable to Christ's death, when we die to sin: when we are "dead to sin." And "if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death, we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." "Our old man is crucified with Him, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin." "Likewise reckon ye yourselves to be dead indeed unto sin, but alive unto God through Jesus Christ our Lord." And Paul had attained a real conformity to his Master's death, which yet is within the reach of those whose hands will never be pierced by the nails, nor whose limbs stretched upon the cross, when he wrote, "I am crucified with Christ; nevertheless I live: yet not I, but Christ liveth in me. And the life which I live in the flesh, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me, and gave Himself for me."

Now it is to be regretted, if in saying this, we seem to be passing from what is tangible and comprehensible into what is mystical and unreal. There is a true connection between our Saviour's death, and our dying to sin; the power of sin being crucified in us. We are able to die to sin, because our Lord died. And in gaining that deliverance from the power of sin, which is expressed in the Scriptural phrase of being dead to it, we are being made indeed conformable to our Lord's death. How true is the analogy suggested by the phrase "dead to sin," you need no more than to be reminded. Of course it is a figure: but it is only

in figurative language that we are able to speak of spiritual processes and facts. You are dead to sin, when it affects you as little as material things do the materially dead: you are dying daily to sin, when its power in you and over you is ever growing less: when you feel less temptation to it, more aversion to it, more indifference to the old things that used to lead you wrong, a natural bent towards what is good, pure, and true. *That* is dying to sin and living to righteousness: *That* is progressive sanctification: *That* is growth in grace. *That* is the painless, happy way,—the way which by God's grace is within our reach,—of being "made conformable to Christ's death."

And this we can ask for ourselves without any reservation;—without the least fear lest we be asking something very good for St Paul, but very terrible for you and me. To grow holier: to be more thoroughly delivered from the love and power of sin: *that* we do not fear. We do not desire it, indeed, so earnestly as we ought; nor with so clear a sense of what a substantial possession we are asking. But at least we know that we ought to desire it. It means happiness here, and meetness for glory hereafter. Oh that we may all so effectually bear about our Saviour's dying, that we may be "made conformable unto His death!"

There is more to be said. There is a sense, and a very true one, in which, in the literal force of the words, we might ask like St Paul to be made comformable

to the death of our Lord. When we said we shrunk from being made literally like *that*, it was because we meant by His death only the act of His dying. And we could not say we wished to leave this world in torture, if it were possible by God's good will to leave it in a more peaceful way. But think, what was Christ's death? It was far more than the mere season of unutterable anguish in body and soul. It was the glorious end of His sorrowful life: the consummation of it all. It was the triumphant finishing of His great work: it was the step into the peace and rest of Paradise. "To-day shalt thou be with Me in Paradise:" He was there in the instant that He died. And it was not absent, this view of His death, from Paul's mind. He instantly adds to his prayer to be conformed to Christ's death, one reason why: "If by any means I may attain unto the resurrection of the dead." He would like to die like Christ, if he might rise like Him too! Oh my friends, if this be Christ's death, pray Him we may be conformed to it! That we may find death, as He found it, the end of all sorrow and strife: the copestone of our life, that makes it complete, and makes sure we shall never disappoint God or man by a sad failure: the step into perfect rest and peace: the going home to the golden Jerusalem! Oh, like Him, to close our eyes on troublesome life, and open them on peaceful immortality: to know that the parting pang is the very last, entering where there is no more pain: like Him

to think our work is well done, nothing broken off we desired to end, but all rounded and finished! Surely, my friends, in the deeper and truer view of it, we take up the Apostle's prayer in its literal force: and ask, most heartily, that we may be made conformable to our Saviour's death!

Was it when lifted up by some special season, that St Paul uttered the prayer of which we have thought to-day? Rather so than in the sober course of daily life, when even he would hardly be equal to it! Was it when lifted up by some sight of his Master, clearly vouchsafed to faith; or by some very happy and peaceful Communion season? Doubtless, brethren, we have our special seasons which are our best: which raise us to heights of tranquil joy and holy purpose, otherwise little known. And if the Holy Spirit has brought the force and meaning of the solemn words home to us to-day, as they do not come commonly; so that we feel able to sympathise with St Paul as we cannot always do: if He has made us feel that many as are the prayers which have been offered in this church in departed years, and many the words of counsel spoken, never was there worthier prayer than this, nor a sounder purpose formed than that to take it for our own; oh, let us avail ourselves of this favourable moment. And let us ask Him, of whom we have to ask the supply of many little wants,—daily bread, and guidance in little daily perplexities,—ask Him

for something better by far; and ask it with an earnestness on which we shall look back for our profit in days to come, feeling that it is the prayer that brings its answer. So we ask of our Blessed Saviour, who never repelled a humble hearty request for any good thing, for something we know is good for us, yea something which is the very best:—even "that we may know Him, and the power of His resurrection;" yes, and if it be His holy will, "the fellowship of His sufferings;" if only, of His great mercy, we be "made comformable unto His death!"

IV.

ST ANDREW.

"One of the two which heard John speak, and followed Him, was Andrew, Simon Peter's brother. He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messias, which is, being interpreted, the Christ. And he brought him to Jesus."—ST JOHN i. 40–42.

THERE is a passage in one of the Epistles of St Paul, which in our authorised version of the New Testament is rendered, twice over, as a declaration that St Paul regarded himself as "in nothing behind the very chiefest apostles." Eminent scholars have declared that herein our translation does St Paul injustice; and that his meaning was something quite different from that which the reader of the English Bible would suppose. But though we must not now venture to bring forward St Paul's words as proof that there was gradation of dignity even among those honoured to hold the first and highest place in the ministry of the Church of Christ, yet truly we do not need any inspired authority to certify us that in some sense that was so. For though all the Apostles were equal as concerning the fact of their apostleship,

yet there arose among them the same differences in personal weight, prominence, and interest, which are sure to arise among the individuals who compose any order of men, do what you may to ensure their parity. And so long as men cherish gratefully the remembrance of those whose written words have counselled, calmed, and cheered; so long as men go back upon the recorded lives of those whose lives were nobly spent, in the holiest and best of causes; so long will St Peter, St John, and St Paul, rank as "the very chiefest Apostles."

If St Andrew, certainly Apostle, and if tradition tells true, Martyr, was enabled by God's grace to say things and do things which, had we known them, would have set him in our hearts and memories with these three, then it has pleased God to order that their record should not come down to us. We know very little of him: his personality, his character, his history, are very briefly set before us. To us indeed, dwelling in the city which bears his name, his name has grown familiar as is that of no other Apostle: and apart from any ecclesiastical sanction, we all know how Scotchmen, scattered over the world, gather to revive the associations of the dear mother-country, as that day in the year comes back, which has for many centuries been linked with his memory. You know, too, that when in some distant corner of the earth, the church is raised for the worship of the beloved and sacred Institution which has come down to us

from our Christian fathers, there never can be two opinions as to whose name the church shall bear. And yet, we have not an Epistle, we have not a line, that St Andrew wrote. Few indeed are his recorded words: half-a-dozen sentences can contain them all. Very few are the deeds we are told of his doing. Still it seems to me, that anywhere in Christendom, it ought to be interesting to try to revive for a little the life of any one to whom was appointed the high privilege, yet doubtless the great trial of faith, to be one of the immediate attendants of our Blessed Redeemer: and in the case of St Andrew it seems as though the few incidents recorded of his life were specially suggestive and instructive.

Let us recal the facts of his history, as these are related in Holy Scripture.

St Andrew was of Bethsaida, a city in the land of Gennesareth, and situated close to the famous lake. Its ruins, and its very name, have perished from the place where it stood. He was the son of Jonas, and the brother, whether elder or younger is uncertain, of St Peter. He became a disciple of John the Baptist. He heard the Baptist's strong testimony to the greater dignity of the Christ, Whose Fore-runner he was. And St Andrew was one of those in whose hearing the memorable words were spoken by the Baptist, as he looked on the Saviour just entering on His ministry, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." The next day, in the

presence of two of his disciples, one of whom was St Andrew, and the other of whom remains unnamed and probably was St John, the Baptist, looking upon the Redeemer, again exclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God!" Upon this, these two followed Jesus: and being kindly received by Him, abode with Him that day. Then follow the circumstances recorded in the text. St Andrew, deeply convinced by what in that unrelated interview he had seen of our Lord, that This was indeed the Messiah, hastens to find his more renowned brother Peter, and brings him to Jesus. In the catalogue of the Apostles given by St Matthew, in which you will remember the names are arranged in pairs,—an arrangement explained by what St Mark tells us, that our Lord sent out the twelve, two and two,—the name of Andrew stands second, following that of Peter. And it has been suggested that these two were sent forth together, because they were fitted to support and encourage one another: because, too, there was that in the character of each which made it the better for him to be associated with the other: the hasty, impetuous Peter being all the better for the companionship of a slower, quieter, more deliberate nature,—as it seems likely that of Andrew was. The remaining notices in Scripture of this Apostle, are few. We find him, along with Peter, James, and John, privately inquiring of our Saviour as to the signs of His coming. We find that when certain Greeks desired an inter-

view with Christ, Andrew and Philip made their request known to our Lord. And when the five thousand were miraculously fed in the desert, it was Andrew who pointed out the lad with the five barley loaves and the two fishes which were to be so wonderfully multiplied. In the Acts, the name occurs just once, in the list of their names who continued with one accord in prayer after our Lord's Ascension: but where, how, and for what time, St Andrew set himself to fulfil the parting command to preach and baptize, we do not know. After that mention at the beginning of the Acts, the name disappears from Holy Scripture. Early Church historians speak of his having preached in Scythia and in Thrace: mention is made of an Apocryphal book, called The Acts of Andrew, which some valued above all the other sacred writings: and the long-received tradition is, that in the end the Apostle died by crucifixion, being bound upon that decussated cross whose form is so familiar to us, and which has for very long borne his name. It was at Patrae in Achaia that tradition says St Andrew died. And doubtless when the congregation assembled on this spot five hundred years since, they were oftentimes told that the history of the Apostle and Martyr did not end with his death. They were told how a faithful saint, bearing with him the bones of the first-called Apostle, was wrecked upon a desolate spot of the coast of Scotland; and how, in the place made sacred by those relics, there

rose a famous city, to be, in a wild country and amid an uncivilised people, the centre of Christian learning and light. And no doubt, on such a day, those who could afford to pay for it, would be permitted, after the sermon was over, to enter some place carefully locked and guarded; and there to get whatever good they might from the contemplation of what they believed to be the relics of one of the earliest friends and followers of Christ.

We turn away, my friends, from vain fancies and traditions; and fix, for a little, upon those facts in St Andrew's life of whose certainty there can be no question; and which have their instruction for us who are here to-day.

And one thing which cannot but suggest itself to us, thinking of the entire history, is, that though St Andrew was one of the very first called of Christ's disciples, and (as commonly reckoned) the very first-called of the Apostles, it was not given to him, so far as is recorded, to attain to such a measure of usefulness in his Master's work, as was vouchsafed to others. There was an Apostle, not the first-called but the last: one who tells us that the special sight of the Saviour, needful to every Apostle, was given to him last of all, as to one born out of due time: one who was a persecutor of the Church, years after the other had been honoured with the Apostleship: and yet, how much more was done towards the planting and training of

the Church of God by one who entered the race so late, and after so bad a start, than by him who set out so fairly from the very beginning! Whether St Paul said so himself or not, *we* need not scruple to say of him that he was in nothing behind the very chiefest Apostles: of St Andrew no one will think of saying *that*. What kind of preacher he was, what kind of writer: what the churches he planted, who the friends he made; what his zeal, his wisdom, his encouragements, his failures and disappointments; how many souls he won to Christ, how kindly he counselled and carefully tended them; all these things the great day of account must declare. Doubtless there are those in heaven who know them all: those there who never will forget St Andrew's voice, and the words it spoke to them, and the good it did them: but there are none here on this side of time. But of this we may be sure; that the sainted Apostle did the work which his Lord appointed him; and if that was an undistinguished work, and one whose remembrance was to perish, *that* concerns mainly the great and wise Disposer, Who appoints to each servant his talent according to his several ability, and Who gives to every man his work. My friends, we are all ready sometimes discontentedly to fancy, that we have it in us to be far more useful and eminent than it has pleased God to appoint us to be: we think perhaps that our lot has circumscribed the makings of greater powers than we have ever shewn: and doubtless to many an

earnest-minded man, the thorn in the flesh, or the crook in the lot, never comes in a form so painful, as in the form of something that diminishes or destroys his usefulness,—that keeps him from serving as he would wish his generation and his Saviour; that constrains noble powers, or what might have come to such, to rust sadly and uselessly away. Think of Moses, that great man of God, wasting (as human beings would judge) the best years of his life, as a shepherd in the desert of Midian. And thinking of this, and of the many instances like it which we ourselves have known: thinking of the unrecorded lot and life of him in whom the Saviour had seen *that* which made Him choose him for his first Apostle; what can we do but bow before the Great Disposer; sure that He does all things well: sure that He has good reason for arrangements in His providence for which we can see no reason whatsoever. "It had pleased God;" and the matter is settled. "Thy will be done:" it must be right. "I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because Thou didst it!"

Let us mark, in the brief history of the hardly-known Apostle, one fact strongly brought out, that shews us character. As soon as he was sure that Jesus was the Messiah, he felt this was knowledge he could not keep to himself. As soon as he had enrolled himself as a disciple of our Lord, he was eager to bring another. And he began at home the

work for which he was henceforth to live and die. "He first findeth his own brother Simon, and saith unto him, We have found the Messiah, which is the Christ; and he brought him to Jesus."

"Brought him to Jesus:" it was the kindest and best service that any human being can do to any other. You remember how this brother Simon found it so in his own experience: it was he who, after acquaintance with the Saviour, said in a season when some were falling off from our Lord, "Lord, to whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life." And it is the duty of every Christian to seek to bring others to Christ. Indeed, it is not a matter of calculation; not a thing we do because on weighing the matter we conclude we ought to go and do it: by the irresistible impulse of his whole being, the man who has found the Messiah, desires to see his brethren, his friends, his countrymen, his fellow-creatures, all brought to Jesus. There are things which people value because other people have not got the like; things which if every one had them would be of no worth to any one; but all who have found the one thing needful, would wish that the same best blessing might be possessed by all human beings, everywhere. And by the very necessity of the case, we may say with confidence, No one ever went to heaven alone. No one ever laid hold on eternal life, and then kept it all to himself: *That* cannot be. There was a writer, an eloquent writer,—how ignorant of the very

alphabet of our holy religion we need not say,—who once said that Christianity was a mean, selfish system; that its great fundamental idea was that every man should try to save his own petty soul. Never was there greater falsehood uttered in this world! True it is, the first prayer must needs be, "God be merciful to *me* a sinner;" as the grand promise is, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ and *thou* shalt be saved:" but the Christian who has the full assurance that his own salvation is safe, is burdened with the sins and sorrows of millions: in some measure, he is compelled to be a partaker of the sufferings of Christ, sharing His sublime self-sacrifice: the sorrows and the sins of others are a heavy and crushing load on the believing heart that has indeed found Christ: God has ordered it so, that here is the thing to which you of necessity advance the moment you get free from the burden of your own sins and fears: and every time your heart is wrung by the sight of others' woe and want, sin and danger, you are feeling some faint degree of what the Saviour felt in the sight of these: you are getting some insight into the essential unselfishness of vital Christianity. There was a good minister of Christ in another Church,—there never was a better,—who was wont often to quote that text which says, "Draw *me*, WE will run after Thee!" Draw but the one to Christ with the cords of love, and far more than the one will follow! Draw but the one; and that one's prayers and pains, and the silent influence of that

one's whole life,—whether he designedly set himself to do it or not,—will bring some others too. And oh brethren, if Christianity be the spirit of a sound mind, that soberly estimates what is good for us poor sinful anxious creatures; and if Christianity be the spirit of love, that wishes to all men that which is best for them; what necessity is laid on every Christian to bring others to Christ in so far as by God's grace he can: bringing them to Him in whom is the only satisfying supply of all the greatest wants of our nature: pardon for sin, grace for weakness and the innate tendency towards sin; comfort for sorrow, rest for weariness, and a peaceful home in heaven when the troubles and temptations of this life are past! And the first Apostle felt it so. As soon as, by personal experience, he had assured himself that he had indeed found the Messiah, he sought out the brother whom he loved, and brought him to Jesus: knowing that once his brother came to Jesus, he would find everything in Him.

It was easier work then, to bring a friend to Jesus, than it is now. It was at least plainer what you had to do. You had but to take the friend's hand, and lead him to where, localised in space, there was manifest in the flesh the Infinite and Invisible God. It is not thus, now, that we can either go to Christ ourselves, or bring another. The spiritual work, the unseen effect upon the soul now, the change in it not visible to us, these things which are now implied in

bringing one to Christ, carry us directly to the deep sense, that no one here can bring another to Christ, save by the grace of the Blessed and Holy Spirit. It is very difficult to make a deep and lasting impression on another soul: very difficult to move another soul to a resolution which will endure, year after year. You cannot take your child's little hand now, and lead him to Christ, as you might have done when He tabernacled among men. Oh may the Holy Ghost give us the wisdom and prudence, the zeal and courage, which we shall need before we can rightly try to bring souls to Christ: oh may He savingly and lastingly impress the hearts we seek and pray to bring to Jesus! May He make our words, our prayers, our affection, our works, our whole life, so tell upon those dearest to us and upon all who know us, as that the tendency of all may be, to bring them to Jesus! To bring them to Him, not as of old, when you might have materially brought to Him one who spiritually had not come at all; but to bring with the whole heart's consent of the comer, in that spiritual act which goes to Him in penitence, love, and faith!

Let us go on to think of another certain and memorable fact, in the history of St Andrew.

Though he was an Apostle of little fame and distinction, who has left hardly any legacy of warning or comfort to the Church of these latter days, he yet was the means of bringing to Christ one who stands forth

strongly in the Church's history as one of the very chiefest Apostles: one who, in the estimation of many Christian people, ranks as the very first of them all. It was St Peter who preached that sermon on the day of Pentecost, whereby the Holy Ghost added to the Church about three thousand souls. It was St Peter who opened the door of faith to the Gentiles, commanding the house of Cornelius to be baptized. It was St Peter who wrote those Epistles, which will be the precious heritage of believing hearts till the end of time. And it was to him that our Saviour said the ever-memorable words, which have indeed been sometimes perverted to a sense they cannot bear, but which say so much for the personal share borne by him to whom they were spoken in the first edification of the Christian society, "Thou art Peter, and upon this rock I will build my Church." And beyond the question of the personal dignity and interest which attach to St Peter, you know how much Christian people owe to his history, (specially to the history of his great failure and his merciful restoration,) of warning against vain self-confidence, of insight into the Blessed Redeemer's way of treating the failing believer, of reclaiming and restoring him,—of a host of things in Christian experience, which are fresh in every Christian memory and warm in every Christian heart.

My friends, is it saying too much, to say that for all this we have to thank St Andrew? It was he who brought the greater Apostle to Christ: it was

through his instrumentality that St Peter entered that career of faith, love, and usefulness, of sorrowful fall and joyful restoration, which has made his life so much to us, and to all Christians in all ages. No doubt, God could have brought Peter to Jesus by other means,—just as God could have done without Peter at all: but certain it is, God was pleased to honour Andrew as the means through which all Peter's work and example were gained to the Church of Christ. Is there not encouragement to the humble earnest believer in the thought, that though God may have denied him great powers, eminent position, large opportunities, he may yet be permitted, by faithfully seeking to bring those to Jesus to whom his influence may reach, to enlist on the Saviour's side powers far beyond his own; and seeing all the good done by them, humbly to thank God for some true share in it? It is possible, we know, to be partaker in other men's sins, and so to share their guilt and condemnation: but it is possible, too, to be partaker in others' good deeds, and so receive in our own grateful, yet humble hearts, some share of their bright reward. When St Peter, at Pentecost, preached that sermon that won to the Church those three thousand converted souls, was not that, under God, in some measure St Andrew's doing? And rely on it, whatever flush of joy passed through the heart of the great Apostle, at the wonderful use made by the Holy Spirit of his voice, and head, and heart, a yet purer and more

unselfish happiness would be felt by the far less favoured brother, as the thought arose in his thankful soul, Now God has given poor me a hand in that, God be praised! St Andrew could not preach like St Peter: such honour as Peter's have had but few of His saints: but he brought the great Apostle to Jesus, and that was honour enough for him! And never more heartily than in that joyful hour, would both Apostles unite in confessing that all the good ever done by mortal, was done as by the instrument of a higher Hand. "Not by might, nor by power; but My Spirit: saith the Lord of hosts!"

It is possible that it may occur to some of you, that there is a discrepance between the account the text gives of how Andrew brought Simon to Jesus, and the accounts given by St Matthew and St Mark, which represent both brothers as being called together. These evangelists tell us that our Saviour, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw the two brothers casting a net; and said to them Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men. The discrepance is only in appearance. St John tells us of the first introduction of the brothers to Christ: the other evangelists tell us of their formal call to follow Him in His ministry. It was some time, probably a short time, after that first acquaintance recorded in my text, that the formal call to the ministry came. It was because they already knew our Lord, and were sure He was the

Messiah, that they were willing to follow Him so promptly: for you remember how, being called to be fishers of men, "they straightway left their nets, and followed Him." And it is known to some of you, that this ready obedience has been regarded as so characteristic a thing, that in the services of another Church, which, year by year, as his day comes round, remembers St Andrew as we are not told by our Church to do so, the point in the Apostle's history that is specially recalled, and set forth for an example, is this prompt obedience: in that he "readily obeyed the calling of Thy Son Jesus Christ, and followed Him without delay."* No doubt the example is a good one; and the lesson for us is clear and plain. It is that whensoever Christ calls us, we obey at once: and let us all remember this, that whensoever, in things small or things greater, we see plainly what is our duty, there can be nothing in this world more certain than that Christ is calling us, at that moment, to do just that thing. Whenever the working of your own mind, or the judicious advice of another, has shown you clearly what it is right for you to do, these things are your Saviour's voice telling you to do *that*. And do it straightway! No duty grows easier for putting it off: contrariwise, it will grow in apparent bulk and difficulty, and keep you restless and wretched, and humbled and ashamed in your own estimation. Go straight and do it: and in many cases you will

* Collect for St Andrew's Day.

be surprised to find how easily the thing is done which was such a bugbear to think of doing; in every case to find what a relief, and lightening of the heart, it is to have done it. And above all, my friends, when Christ calls us, as He calls each of us, in the most solemn sense of all;—calls us to Follow Him, in the fullest sense of all;—calls us to His service, to His Church, to His great salvation;—calls us to turn from our sinfulness, our folly, our blank dissatisfaction, our native wretchedness; calls us to find in Himself peace and pardon, rest and holiness of heart; calls us by His Providence, His Word, His Spirit; oh let us earnestly pray and endeavour, that the kind God, Who did give such grace to His holy Apostle St Andrew, that he readily obeyed the calling of His Son Jesus Christ, and followed Him without delay; may grant unto us all, that we, being called by His holy Word, may forthwith give up ourselves obediently to fulfil His holy commandments; through the same Jesus Christ our Lord.

V.

HEAVEN.

"Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness." —2 PETER iii. 13.

DOES it not sometimes seem strange to you, that we know so very little of the country beyond the grave? Sometimes this is borne in upon us, with a startling clearness: how little distinct idea we have of what kind of place it is: its scenery, its homes, its occupations. The veil between this world and that is so thick; so impossible for us to see through. And yet we ourselves in a little, perhaps a very little, must go there: *that* is certain. If it were only a distant place in this world we were going to: if we knew that in a little something would come that would make it necessary that we should leave our present homes, our children and friends, and these scenes we know, and go away, all alone, to a distant and unknown land,—how anxious we should be to learn all we could about it,—the place, the people, the occupations, the kind of life! Surely we *should not* be less anxious now, because in a little we are going, not to another place in this world, where we could be

sure that many things would be much as they are here;—where a sun would rise and a sun would set,—where we should live in some kind of dwelling, on some kind of food,—see human faces,—work, grow weary, rest, sleep, wake again,—but into a new and unknown world, where everything may be strange, where many things must be so! We, ourselves, will some day go away from this place, we know not how, passing away from human sight and knowledge,—and enter into another world: we shall waken up from death, and find ourselves there. Strange, to know so little of a Place which we shall see so surely; which we may see so soon!

But there is something even stranger to think of. It is future, our going to that unknown place: and we are able to put away from us, more than is good for us, the thought of things in what we think the far future. But think, that at this very time, in this very moment, some who were the dearest to us in this world are in that distant land; have been there for time longer or shorter. The father and mother are there, of most who have reached middle age: brothers and sisters, once so united: little children, whom Jesus, as of old, called to Himself. We went with them to the furthest edge of this life: but as they crossed the threshold of the other world they became unseen by us: there was no further trace of them: there is no communication from them, no word of what they are doing there. You know how anxious

you are, when your child has gone out from your home, to some distant place, to know all about the way in which he arranges his life: every little thing, nothing to a stranger, is precious to you. Tell us everything, you write: whom you see, what you do: every little homely detail of life: where you take your walk: everything! But when the child goes to the other world, the parent is in blank ignorance of all details in his life: when the father goes, whose ways we knew so thoroughly, we are in utter darkness as to his life there. What is he thinking about? We knew so well what he used to think about here! We knew the chair in which he sat: the table at which he wrote: how he divided out his day. How about these things there? What scenes do they live among that left us: what are they like: what change has passed upon their affections, likings, ways: what are they doing, just this afternoon: what were they doing when we sunk into sleep last night, when we awoke this morning? Are they thinking there of those they loved so much here? It is strange, when we think of it, very strange, that we know so little of the new heavens and the new earth for which we look: of the country, which strangers and pilgrims on earth have sought, through all past ages: of the Golden City, the New Jerusalem, which gives this life its great motive, which is the central fact in all our religious faith!

Now it is plain that it is God's purpose we should know little of the future life and the unseen world:

nothing about the details of these. The inspired writers had many opportunities of launching forth into descriptions which we may venture to say would have been more read and more eagerly read than any other parts of Holy Scripture: there were many occasions directly leading them towards telling us that which all men have so desired to know. When Lazarus came back from the grave, if his sisters asked him where he had been these days he was away from them, we are not told of his reply.* And though there are innumerable references to Heaven throughout the New Testament; though the hope of glory and the state of the redeemed are continually in the mind of every man who wrote the least part of it; yet all references are short, are general, go into no circumstances, give no details of the habitude of being there. It is a most decided characteristic of the revelation in which we have been instructed from our childhood, that it maintains this solemn reserve: it is our Saviour's plain purpose that at the last, when we go from this world, we should go in great ignorance of what we shall see where we are going;—that we should just put a confiding hand in His,—and be content to know that we are going where we shall be with Him. No doubt, His way is best: but if the truth were told, the idea of Heaven which many Christian people have in their mind is not an attractive one. They think of it as a vague, unsubstantial place; a place that will be very

* *In Memoriam*, xxxi.

good, no doubt, but where everything must be strange at the first; a place where they will miss many things and many people they used to love and value here. And even that which, most fitly, is to many hearts one of the pleasantest in their thoughts of our Father's House above, the thought of meeting again those who died, is met by the remembrance that great changes may have passed on them: that the little child that stayed in memory the same little thing for ever, may have grown "so wise and mighty in the wisdom of a better world,"* as to have really ceased to be what we used to know. Now, though it is quite true that only the outlines of the life and the happiness of Heaven are certainly revealed to us, yet perhaps when we try to collect and realise all that the Bible tells us of these, we may find there is more revealed to us than we often think,—far more: and we shall assuredly find that not God's word, but man's interference with it, man's imaginations, and the imaginations of very unfit, foolish, and self-conceited men, are what has made the unseen world far less interesting, far less attractive of human hopes and wishes, than need be. There are people, foolish, and far worse than foolish, who think that the barer and uglier they make this life, the likelier it is to be the life Christ would like to see: and the same people seem to think that the more they strip our conception of Heaven of everything we can realise, everything we can care for, the

* Miss Martineau.

stronger proof they give of spiritual elevation. It is not so: it is mere sourness and narrowness of heart. I can say for myself, that the best and holiest Christian people I have ever known, are those who have most constantly and strongly thought of Heaven as a kindly, home-like place: a real place, not one of unsubstantial shadows: a place where poor human beings will find what will make them happy, and where little children would feel at home!

May the Blessed Spirit of all light and truth help us, as we try to bring together and understand what God's word shows us, concerning the better world.

Now there is one thing, which scripture makes perfectly plain, which unwise teachers have succeeded in obscuring, in very many minds. It is, that the better world is a material place: a place as real and solid as this world. It is indeed by faith that we discern it now; and faith, with us, falls far short of the assurance given by sense: the things we only believe are not present to us in the same apparent reality as those we can see, those we can take hold of. And we vaguely feel as if a world which we now do but mistily discern, had but a misty existence. Of course, you see this is an error, the moment it is stated: our imperfect discernment of it does not affect the solid fact. America is a real place, though those of us who have not seen it have a misty idea of it: and no doubt when you have actually seen a place, it gains in your

mind a reality it had not before. But though as yet, as for the other world, we walk by faith and not by sight, the day is coming when we shall see it: and even now, faith may be greatly strengthened by earnest prayer that God would increase our faith, and keep us from being stumbled by our lurking unbelief of that which we cannot see: faith may be greatly strengthened, too, by frequent thought, earnest thought, upon the realities yet unseen. But in addition to this difficulty in the nature of things, there is another, more easily overcome. People have not entirely got rid of that old idea, that there is something evil about the material: that at least the material is so inferior to the spiritual that it is unworthy to be taken into account in thinking of the better life. And hence the vague and unscriptural belief, that Heaven is not a real, substantial place; or that at all events matter there must exist only in some attenuated, intangible form. Let me quote a sentence of the strong words of Chalmers, setting out just what I mean. "The common imagination" he says "that we have of Paradise on the other side of death, is that of a lofty aerial region, where the inmates float in ether, or are mysteriously suspended upon nothing: where all the warm and sensible accompaniments, which give such an expression of strength, and life, and colouring to our present habitation, are attenuated into a sort of spiritual element, that is meagre and imperceptible, and utterly uninviting

to the eye of mortals here below: where every vestige of materialism is done away, and nothing left but certain unearthly scenes, that have no power of allurement, and certain unearthly ecstacies with which it is felt impossible to sympathise." Now, brethren, however current some vague impression to the effect so well set forth in these words may be, it is without the least warrant in God's word. There is literally no reason at all for thinking so. And we are told, expressly, things which prove that just the opposite is the fact. There is no more vitally Christian doctrine than that of the Resurrection of the Body: "Jesus and the Resurrection" were words always linked together in Apostolic teaching: our Master declared Himself "the Resurrection and the Life:" St Paul's prayer was to know His Saviour "and the power of His Resurrection:" if there be a truth of which we are sure,—sure as words can make us,—it is that happy souls are to have material bodies, as now, when they have entered their final Home: not till soul and body are united again can you have the perfect human being: not till then would St Paul confess that death was swallowed up in victory. Now, material bodies necessitate a material dwelling-place. We "seek a country," not a cloudland: "we look for new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth righteousness!" A place of happy faces, of joyful voices, of sublime music, of scenery such as eye hath not seen. It may be this present world, cleansed by

the final flames of every trace of the evil under which it has so long groaned: for even as it is, we have all seen it look so beautiful, that we have thought that if you could but take away sin and sorrow, this world would do! Perhaps elsewhere, somewhere in the range of God's creation, where already Christ's glorified body is, the Lamb as it had been slain; where already are gathered the glorious company of the Apostles, the goodly fellowship of the Prophets, the noble army of Martyrs; and some, to each of us yet more dear. But wheresoever it be, be assured of this, that it is a real, substantial Place!

Another fact, to take and rest upon, about the Better Country, is, that it is the place of our Blessed Saviour's visible presence. He "Whom having not seen we love," will be seen by all His people there. "When He shall appear, we shall be like Him: for we shall see Him as He is." There, St Paul tells us, "we shall be ever with the Lord." Our Saviour Himself said, "That where I am, there ye may be also." "I will, that they also whom Thou hast given Me be with Me where I am."

Now here is something to hold by. You may be chilled and disheartened somewhat by being told that God is present everywhere; and so not more in any place than in any other: or even that it is doubtful whether you can say of an Infinite Spirit that He stands in such a relation to space as that He can be

said truly to be in any place at all. *That* disheartens us: chills us: we think, Now are we, after all, to be disappointed with heaven, as we have so often been with earth! But there is no mistake as to this: that in heaven we shall see our Blessed Redeemer: the self-same Face, the self-same Hands, the unchanged kindest Heart that did so love all: glorified and exalted, indeed: but "the same yesterday and to-day and for ever!" Oh try to realise that! Not a cold abstract holiness and happiness: but to be always near HIM! There are human beings, even, who seem to diffuse a cheerful, elevating influence around them: you feel better, stronger, happier, when in their company: it seems to call out your worthier self. It is something, for once, to have spoken to a very great and good man: Now think, what it would be to talk with Christ! To understand, as we never could here, all we owe to Him: the good He has done us and all: to know His love, which passeth knowledge! And then, the sense of perfect safety,—of freedom from all danger, all sorrow, all sin, that must come of the Almighty and All-merciful Saviour's presence, always near!

We need not expatiate on this truth: first, because what we need is to feel it, not to talk about it; and next, because the fact that the essential happiness of heaven consists in the Saviour's presence, is one which you have had pressed upon you many times and ways. I speak of it now, mainly to shew you

how like heaven, as shewn in the New Testament, is to earth in this: that its happiness consists chiefly in the exercise of affection: not in the existence of abstract qualities,—nor yet in the presence of material glory and beauty,—the river of life, the walls of precious stones, the streets of gold. And, following up this thought, let us remember, that a thing about heaven and its happiness that we can understand, and which makes it home-like and attractive to people like us, is, that There (if Christ be pleased to bring us there), we shall be re-united to the dear ones who have gone from us and whom we miss daily; meet again those whom we loved best, and lost; and all the good of all ages. Meet the good of all ages, and that is well, and ought to be said: but the great tie to the better world, after all, is the thought of the kindest and best we ourselves have known,—who loved us so much, and to whom it was the bitterness of death to leave us. It will be very good and well to see the Apostle Paul: but there is many a one who knows that he would far rather see again his father and mother, or see his dear little child that died. And quite right to feel that too: quite right to say it! We need not try to pass ourselves off on Christ for anything grander and bigger than we are. "For He knoweth our frame: He remembereth that we are dust!"

Now there are people who would say that this is a low and debasing view of the better world I am trying to give you. There are people who fancy that it

shews superior sanctity to picture out a heaven which no human being could possibly care for, and then say they care for that: like a silly child who thinks to astonish his companions by saying that he likes some nauseous medicine better than something pleasant. There are those who with a crotchetty perversity which we should not be angry with but that it does so much harm, take a pleasure in casting off from the thought of heaven all circumstances that could attract, and then in declaring that this savourless misty incomprehensible thing attracts them.

They have no warrant in the Word of God. None! "Thy brother shall rise again:" with that thought our Lord comforted Martha. St Paul bids Christian folk not sorrow as others who have no hope: "For if we believe that Jesus died and rose again, them also which sleep in Jesus will God bring with Him." It is held out constantly, you know, as one great ground of comfort in bereavement, that there is a peaceful country where death-divided friends meet to part no more.

Here is one of the many points as to which our views of the eternal state of the heirs of salvation have been made much less interesting to our feelings, and so much less inviting, than they need be. One of the most silly, mischievous, purposeless, and groundless errors ever taught,—taught out of pure sourness of nature, and founding upon nothing better than the unhappy belief, that the more disagreeable a thing is,

the likelier it is to be the right thing,—is, that in heaven there is no special individual affection; that the perfection of that better world consists much in an entire elevation above such earthly things as specific attachments; that redeemed souls will care so much for Christ, that they will not care at all for any one else—just as if you could not love God without ceasing to love man. I have seen and heard it stated, that in the future life, blessed human beings will never remember nor recognise those who were dearest to them in this; and perhaps indeed will never remember nor recognise their own identity. So that those admitted to heaven might live through eternity in the society of happy saints, and never know that some one was on earth a sister, a parent, a child: likewise that if they did know, all individual love for them and happiness in being with them would be lost in some transcendental general affection for all alike.

My friends, there is not a syllable in the word of God to support that notion; and anything more outrageously opposed to common sense and the teaching of experience could not be!

You do not find that the heavenliest-tempered people here, are those who care least for individual friends. It is just those Christian people who most really love all, whose hearts are warmest to their children, to the sufferers they know, to old acquaintance. Our Blessed Redeemer, who loved all as no other ever did, had yet His distinguishing human affec-

tion: there was one kindly, gentle "disciple whom Jesus loved" especially. And assuredly, in the better world, under the supreme love of Him for whose sake only we can ever go there, will be the joy of being with those who were most loved here: and with those too, never here seen or known, whose lives did us good to think of, and whose words to recall. It is most right, thinking of heaven, to think of the noble company which (if Christ bring us thither) we shall find there;—the best and purest of the Race, now glorified into perfect purity and goodness;—many whom it would have done us so much good to know as they were here, but how much more good to know as they are there! And as those who were friends as children, amid childhood's sports and cares, are sometimes fast friends when they have grown old, and passed to other scenes in this world, and other things to think of,—faster and dearer friends because of the store of old remembrances which they have in common, of the dear departed days;—even so, those dearest upon earth will surely be dearest in glory too: dearer, in eternity, by the thought of old days here: dearer, amid that perfect peace and rest, for the thought of old cares and sorrows borne together!

Let us think of just one matter, in regard to which a vague belief in many minds takes from the attractiveness of the new heavens and new earth we look for. Many have a confused idea, as if there were nothing

to do in heaven, but continually sing God's praises: as if there were no progress there, no work, nothing to do, nothing to learn, no room for improvement. Now we know that after weariness, mere rest is very pleasant for a time: you can think of that great genius who said, that after the labour and weariness of this life, what he longed for was an unbroken slumber of at least a thousand years: many have known the feeling, the weary craving for mere rest. But unless we are to be essentially changed in the other life from what we are here, in a little while the soul will crave for occupation. An eternity of nothing to do would be a wearisome thing.

But, apart from some floating, undefined fancy in minds which do not take the trouble of defining their ideas, there is not the least ground for believing in a future life of nothing to do. Though there be rest, that does not imply either absence of occupation, or a stationary state without growth or progress. God's worship, indeed, in its highest and happiest exercise, will abound there: yielding a solid joy of which our most elevated and joyful seasons of devotion may afford us some faint glimpses. But besides this, there will surely be much of God's will to do; many things set by the Saviour to be busy about. And all that is good in the blest soul will be continually developed: there will be growth in knowledge and in all grace: infinite progression in happiness, and in likeness to Christ. Doubtless work there will abound: our

Saviour, who gave to every man his work here, will have full occupation for the glorified and amplified powers there: but all happy work; without weariness; without painful over-exertion: never a failure, never a disappointment. The angels, we know, have abundance of Christ's work to do: and glorified human beings, we know, are "even as the angels."

We must speak humbly of such a thing: but the teaching of the New Testament, making it so plain that in the other world men and women will be just what they grow into here, he that is holy holy still and he that is filthy filthy still,—morally and spiritually what they have grown into here, only developed, carried out, perfected,—does seem to lead to the belief, that there may be more resemblance between the earthly and heavenly states than we sometimes suppose. Of course, in the other world there is no birth nor death,—all are immortal. Then sin will be gone, sorrow, infirmity, want; and the people infinitely holier and happier: those things, too, which are suitable only for this state of being will be away. But otherwise, the new heaven and earth wherein dwelleth righteousness, may be very like that in which dwelt sorrow and sin. This world was a paradise once: it may be the like again, when the New Jerusalem comes down to it from God: when sin and sorrow are fled: when the glorified Saviour is here: when there is "no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither any more pain!"

We have been thinking, you see, of the Final Abode of the redeemed: of their eternal life after the Great Resurrection. And you have seen, I trust, that there is more about these revealed, for us to lay hold of and rest in, than we often fancy. We know less of the state of our blest friends now, in the intermediate time between death and the Resurrection. Their souls are separated from their bodies meanwhile: and many perplexing thoughts come, as to their mode of being, when we try to follow that out. Probably we can do no better than simply accept that cheering teaching we have all known so long: that the "souls of believers are at their death made perfect in holiness, and do immediately pass into glory." They are with Christ: and they are happy. Their special blessing is Rest. "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord: for they do rest from their labours." Rest, after the toils of the weary day: enjoy the sense that sin is pardoned and done with;—that all cares and fears are past;—that all the trials of this world are gone; that their will is entirely resigned to their Saviour's, so that they have no wish for anything but what He approves. But though thus holy and happy now, they know that better things await them: and in sure and certain hope, as well as in present perfect peace, they await the Resurrection-day.

My friends, we have been trying, this afternoon, to reach after a more substantial thought and belief

about the Better World, than that to which various floating, groundless fancies often hold us down. Have we in any degree succeeded? Do we feel, now, an earnest desire to obtain a true part in our Redeemer's great Sacrifice: a true measure of God's grace to make us begin, here, to grow meet for the inheritance of the saints in light? Are we aware of any dawning upon us of that great truth, blurred by human error and folly, that Heaven is not a vague impalpable unreality, but a real, warm, familiar Home? Then thank God for that: but even yet, do you not feel that you are driven back to an old conclusion, in which, in our best hours, we can heartily acquiesce? It is, that after all, we know very little now: but that we are able to trust our Blessed Saviour with all! *He* knows, exactly, all these things we wish to know, but cannot. We trust Him, with all our hearts, with those dear ones gone from us, whom we loved on earth and love still. He is keeping our little children, always young in remembrance: He is keeping those who went from us, care-lined and gray-headed, who are now no longer old. And when we go ourselves, poor weary creatures, oh may His Spirit help us to commit our souls to His merciful keeping, content to go to Him!

VI.

THE PLACE OF PRAISE IN THE WORSHIP OF GOD.

"Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still praising Thee."—Ps. lxxxiv. 4.

YOU see what it is that the inspired man who wrote that psalm takes to represent the occupation of God's house. It is Praise. "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house; they will be still praising Thee." *That* is a thing so vital to God's worship,—so great and happy a part of the service of those who are engaged in God's worship,—that it may fitly be taken to stand for it all. Praise is (in the judgment of the Psalmist) the great characteristic thing about God's house and His service. And we may say with confidence that in this matter there was no change, in passing from the old dispensation to the new. If there be a difference, it is, that Christian people have infinitely greater reason for praise than ever: infinitely more to praise God for. We have seen the Saviour come, and die, and rise: we have heard of the coming and the work of the Blessed

Holy Spirit. Therefore with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, it becomes us to praise and magnify God's glorious Name, thanking Him for His unspeakable gift.

I venture to say, that the Psalmist's words in the text, put praise in a very different place, for dignity and importance, from that in which it is often set in the judgment of Christian people in these days. As for fixing on praise, the audible and united singing of His praise by the congregation, as a great, vital part of God's worship, *that* is just the last thing that many people would do. The days have been, in this country, in which not only praise, but prayer as well, were so completely subordinated to preaching,—were made such secondary matters in comparison with *that*, that the text, if brought to square with the general estimate, would have needed to run, not "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still praising Thee;" but "Blessed are they that dwell in Thy house: they will be still hearing sermons." Let us thank God, that juster notions now prevail: and while I trust we shall never under-rate the preaching of Christ's Gospel as many are found to do, but value it highly as a divinely-appointed means of convincing and converting sinners and of comforting and edifying believers, — still we have come to rate more highly, as a vital part of the occupations of God's house, that blessed and mighty privilege and duty of united supplication, which

especially gives its name to the house of Prayer. But even yet, there is great forgetfulness of the duty, the privilege, the supreme importance, of Praise. We all fail, more or less, to set *that* in its proper place in the public worship of God. If a minister with us bestows ever so much thought and time on the preparation of his sermons, *that* is thought all right by everybody. Happily, too, it is now thought fit, by all intelligent persons, that a minister should not presume to lead the devotions of the congregation, without previous thought of the most earnest and serious character: and the more insight one gets by longer experience, the more deeply will it be felt how difficult a thing it is to attain to even a remote conformity to the standard set forth by a devout heart and a reflective mind, of what common prayer should be. But if a minister is found to give much thought and pains to the service of praise,—that service which you have seen the Psalmist deemed so vitally important,—all this is often esteemed as a harmless crotchet, the result of an excessive love of music, in which judicious people can hardly be expected seriously to sympathise. There is, in many places, little sense that to secure in God's house a simple, beautiful, united, hearty music, is a great and solemn end, worthy of long thought and much labour. And one result of this steady depreciation of praise from its proper dignity in God's worship, is that in very many churches, specially in country parishes, the singing is

so inexpressibly heartless and bad, that far from having a devotional influence upon the mind, it causes a feeling of irritation and disgust, painfully inconsistent with the temper a devout worshipper would desire to have within him in the house of God. Another result is, that there are churches in which it is plain that the singing of the psalm is regarded as something to give the minister a rest: as a break in the service, not a vital part of it: as a sort of trivial interruption to more important things. And you will find preachers, who, after unreasonably lengthening out their sermon, will economise time by cutting down the united praise of the congregation to almost nothing: thus making it plain what in their judgment is the unimportant thing, to be dispensed with when it seems convenient.

Yet, my friends, if ever there was a place where praise ought to be a serious thing, seriously considered, it is a Scotch parish church. For not merely ought we here to remember that whatever we offer to God,—praise as everything else,—should be our very best, given with a full heart, but we have further reason, peculiar to ourselves. For, in our churches, praise is the only part of the service in which the congregation join with their voices as well as with their hearts: the only thing, from first to last, in which you have the united voices of a multitude, lifted up together. Elsewhere, many of the prayers, in God's service, are said aloud by the whole congregation: and parts of the

service are said by the people in response to the words of the minister. But that is not allowed among us. The congregation is prayed *for*, as it is preached *to:* it is only in the singing of God's praise that we all cry to God together. Surely the little we thus do in common, should be done heartily, and well, and by every one!

I have thought it a very fit thing that to-day I should turn your thoughts to such a matter as the place of praise in the public worship of God, as that is set out in God's own Word; and that I should ask you to reflect on some obvious considerations, though not the less for that needful considerations, concerning short-comings and helps in praise.

"They will be still praising Thee." I do not say that praise consists exclusively in the actual singing of sacred words to the glory of God. There may be the silent praise of the heart: there may be the praise that is expressed in words that are spoken without being sung; though there can be no question that it is hard to read or to speak praise: it seeks its natural expression in music: and a good man, a most competent authority, lately declared that he found it almost impossible to *read* a psalm. The Psalms, which after all these centuries remain the very height and perfection of praise to God, were composed to be

sung, not to be read. "Singing," said a very devout man, many years since, "is as much the proper use of a psalm, as devout supplication is the proper use of a form of prayer; and a psalm only read is very much like a prayer that is only looked over."* In any case, there is no doubt what the inspired writer meant in my text: if you look to the original language, the reference to praise expressed in music becomes much more certain than in our translation it looks. The thing which the Psalmist desired to commend so warmly, is the actual joining of our voices and our hearts together in the singing of our Redeemer's praise.

Is it strange, my friends, that the inspired man that wrote that verse should set the singing of praise to our Saviour so high? Or is it not rather most fitly said, that is said here? Surely the experience of Christian people can testify, that there is nothing that so lifts up the heart, nothing that so elevates us to the happiest possibilities of devotion, nothing that does so help in prayer and in preaching and hearing, as hearty and beautiful and united praise. Doubtless there are people, who cannot in the least understand this that I am saying: people who are so utterly devoid of musical ear and sensibility, that to them the sublimest music is just nothing at all,—just like any other noise: but these are very few; and would be fewer still if

* Law's "Serious Call," chap. xi.

praise were made the serious study and work it ought to be. You know how that marvellously brave and energetic Reformer Martin Luther,—who was at once the great preacher and the great singer of the Reformation,—declared that he would not suffer any young man to be ordained to the ministry, unless he had been well exercised and practised in music. And who does not know concerning our own forefathers, who (amid many faults and errors) yet did lay the foundations of our civil and religious liberty, what inspiration they drew from the sad yet stirring psalm-tunes they sang on the lonely hill-sides? Who does not remember, as a tender association of his boyhood, that ancient tune always sung between the Table-Services on a Communion Sunday? And with a pathos as touching do those psalms and airs come back to us, which the congregation sang on a communion-evening, gathered under the blue sky, among the gray stones and green graves: a music rude indeed, but so instinct with real hearty feeling, that it has touched even unused hearts till they sought relief in tears. Many of us, I doubt not, remember very little indeed of the sermons we heard as children: but we remember the psalms we sang, and the tunes to which we sang them: and these are among the things which we never will forget.

A thing that you would say needed hardly to be said, if it were not that experience shews it needs very much to be said, is, that everybody ought to join in

the singing of God's praise in church. We ought to regard it as a sacred duty, to add our voice to those of our fellow-worshippers. I do not mean that people with no musical ear or voice are called to do this. They cannot: it is an impossibility: if they tried to do it, they would merely distress their neighbours: and where it has pleased God to deny the power of praising Him with an audible voice, we may be well assured He will graciously accept the silent praise of the heart. Our God is not a hard Master requiring of His children that they should do what He has made them unable to do. But how many are there, do you think, who cannot sing God's praise? You may be almost startled when I tell you that a most competent authority, the Secretary of the General Assembly's Committee on Psalmody, has declared, that ninety-six in every hundred men, and ninety-eight in every hundred women, are capable of being taught to sing. So that, out of a congregation of a thousand persons, something like nine hundred and seventy ought, if properly instructed, and duly impressed with the duty, to be found joining in the praise. Now I need not tell any one how much less a proportion of the congregation, in many churches, actually take their share in this pleasant and profitable exercise. Nor need it be shown what an increase in heartiness and enjoyment there would be in public worship, if in every church as great a part of the congregation joined cordially in the psalm. Very poor, very heartless, very little like the united praise of God,

sounds the singing of even the finest choir, while the congregation sit and listen in silence. And I have worshipped in churches, where not a soul except the members of the choir appeared to sing a note. Most chilling, most depressing, to preacher and hearers, was the result. Rather than that, let us have the very roughest and rudest music, in which all voices join!

But though a choir, however cultivated, be a miserable substitute for the united voices of the congregation, a choir is a most valuable instrument for the leading of the congregation's praise. Indeed, it may be confidently said, that unless in very exceptional cases, where the whole congregation has that musical training which makes it one great choir, a company of voices of special power and cultivation, maintaining the different parts which constitute harmony, is absolutely essential to correct and good congregational singing. Nothing can be more mistaken than what we have sometimes heard said by good people, utterly ignorant of music, that a choir necessarily silences the congregation. I do not deny that it sometimes does so. If a congregation have so little conviction that praise is the duty of every one, as to sit still and listen, for the pleasure of listening, to a fine choir, as though it were possible to praise God by proxy, *then* the congregation may indeed be silent: and the fault is entirely its own. Or if a choir be conducted with so little taste and sense, as to make it plain that its members desire, not to lead the congregation but to

show off their own voices: if the tunes sung be of that complex, florid, and thoroughly unbecoming character, that people cannot join in them, unless trained as scientific musicians,—what are sometimes called *showy tunes*, which are as ugly to a musical taste as they are offensive to a devout heart,—*then* the congregation may be silent too: and the fault will be entirely with those who conduct the choir. But I need not tell you that neither of these alternatives is a necessary one. A congregation may have that sense of responsibility, which will make it feel it cannot delegate to others the duty of praise: and a choir may be so conducted that every soul in church that has a vestige of ear or voice may join in every note it sings. Of course, a person who cannot sing at all, cannot sing in church any more than anywhere else: but I say that every person who can sing at all, ought to be able to sing every note of every tune sung by a well-conducted choir. Now I need not tell you, that this wise and becoming rule prevails in this church. There is never a tune sung here, which may not be easily joined in by every soul that can sing at all. If there be any exception, it is in the case of those Doxologies which close the praise at the afternoon service: which are kept up through long-established usage; and which come in the place of the Anthem in the worship of other communions. Even in these, we are always aiming at greater simplicity; and by placing the words of them within your

reach, and by frequent repetition of the same Doxologies, all is done that can be done to induce a universal joining in these. But as for the tunes to which we sing the psalms and paraphrases, these are as simple and easy as it is possible for tunes to be. There are no flourishes: very seldom a line repeated: commonly just one note to each syllable of the words sung: and who that has any knowledge of the matter but must feel that not merely are these tunes the simplest and easiest, but beyond all comparison the most noble and beautiful, and the most like the solemn worship of our Saviour and God? Oh what a difference, between the undevout and ugly tunes, without a trace of religious character, full of flourishes, repetitions, duets and solos and fugues, in which no congregation could possibly join; and the plain, solemn, and noble tunes, centuries old; in which our fathers poured out their hearts in more devout days; and preserving, some of them, the melodies which Christian people have sung for seventeen hundred years! No one in this church can plead as an excuse for silence at praise, that the tunes are so ornate and difficult that he cannot sing them. It is impossible that music can be simpler, than (as a general rule) we have it here. Let us resolve, my friends, that we shall never keep back a hearty voice from the heart-warming duty! I do not think we commonly fail of this, when gathered within these walls. Our singing is for the most part cordial and

united. But surely the volume of joyful sound, from so great a congregation, might be a mighty one! Oh that our souls, and all that is within us, were stirred up, more and more, to bless our Saviour's holy name! "Let the people praise Thee, O God: let ALL the people praise Thee!"

And thus speaking of the praise of our own church, I may properly say, that you must have remarked of late years, that here, as in all churches where praise has been rescued from the discreditable neglect in which it so long lay in this country, the tunes are sung much faster than they used to be sung. I need not tell anybody who has the smallest knowledge of music, that this is just because whereas they used to be sung wrong, now they are sung right. That more rapid time in which our psalm tunes are now taken, is the proper time, and that which their composers intended. You can all see how great an improvement is this more animated and hearty rendering of God's praise, over the dreary drawling of past times; wherein church music was sleepy, like various other things about the church of those days. That slow way of dragging through a psalm, in which one almost forgot the beginning of a verse before reaching its end, so far from being inspiriting and rousing, had a most drowsy result. And it is curious that those who practised it did not see how often the lagging music was in the flattest contradiction to the spirit of the

words to which it was sung. We can all remember, probably, how that fine tune called the Old Hundredth used to be dragged out into the most tedious of dirges: Just think how inconsistent that was with the words of the psalm, "Sing to the Lord with cheerful voice!" And it was this wearisome way of singing which led to a custom from which we are gradually being delivered: I mean the custom of cutting a little bit out of a psalm and singing that; instead of doing what the inspired man that wrote the psalm intended, and singing it right through. There is a curious instance, which from time to time brings it home to us how greatly we have shortened our praises, from the way of God's people in ages gone. You all remember how, when the sacrament of Christ's body and blood was celebrated for the first time, our Saviour and His Apostles sang a hymn, before going out to the Mount of Olives. And ministers who are mindful of these matters, invariably ask the congregation, after the table services are over, to sing, in our own language, a portion of the selfsame hymn which on that ever-memorable evening was sung by Christ.* But it is but a small portion of that famous hymn we sing. We sing four verses: Christ and the Apostles sang more than eighty. Doubtless the reason why they were able, without fatigue, to sing so very large

* Ps. cxv. 12–18 is the portion sung in Scotch Churches. The famous *hymn* is that called the Hallel, consisting of the hundred and thirteenth and five following Psalms.

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a portion of the Psalms, was, that instead of the more laboured music with which we are familiar, they employed that simpler and more rapid yet most expressive and beautiful mode which is commonly called chanting: which was the music for which King David wrote his psalms: the music to which the psalms were sung in Solomon's Temple by a choir of four thousand voices and instruments; and which has been in almost universal use throughout the Church of Christ ever since its foundation. Let me say, that I hail with thankfulness its increasing use in this country: and that I gladly anticipate the days when we shall find whole congregations, with heart and voice, singing such hymns as our Blessed Redeemer sang, to the selfsame notes in which He sang them. Oh, talk of *sacred music:* what music is so sacred as that sung by Him! And so it happens, we have good reason to know what was the music sung by our Saviour and His Apostles that night in which He was betrayed. Perhaps some even of those present who have a knowledge of church song, may not be aware that it was what is called the Peregrine Tone, the Ninth of the Gregorian Chants. It is simple music; very plain and simple: A child could sing it; as a child could in ten minutes be taught to sing any ancient chant. But I think, my friends, that the music which was good enough for Christ, is good enough for you and me.

In these days of revived interest in the service of

praise, you are all aware that praise has furnished matter for much difference of opinion among Christian people; and that considerable diversity of practice in regard to praise exists within our own National Church. I have preached in several churches where the congregation stand while singing; and in several, too, where the voices of the worshippers were directed and assisted by the blended notes of that magnificent instrument of music which has for many centuries been so associated with Christian psalms and hymns of praise. And I am constrained to testify that I never heard praise so hearty, so universal, so beautiful and devout, as where these things were so. It is childish to condemn these things on the ground that they are innovations. An innovation just means a new thing: and the question is not whether a thing is new, but whether a thing is good; not whether a thing is a change, but whether it is a change for the better. Steamboats were an innovation: railways were an innovation: the electric telegraph was an innovation: the Reform Bill now passing through Parliament* is a tremendous innovation. But to say *that* is saying neither good nor bad about these things: we are to consider carefully, when any change, in politics, or worship, or machinery, is proposed, whether it is a change for the better or a change for the worse. An innovation may be a very bad thing or a very good thing. To a man long tormented by some painful

* July 1867.

disease, it would be a great innovation to be brought to a state of health and comfort; and who but a fool would value the relief less for that? Now, there is no doubt at all, that good people in this country differ on the question whether standing at praise is an improvement on sitting; and on the question whether it is better to have organs in church or to do without them. I believe that within this congregation there might be found decided difference of opinion upon these questions. And no wise minister, whatever his own personal likings, would ever seek to press these upon a congregation, to even a small part of which they might give pain. I am glad to have the opportunity which my subject of this afternoon gives me, to assure all who hear me, that I never will ask this congregation to make any change whatsoever from the old way; that I never would even consent to any change from the old way, unless the congregation desired it with something like unanimity. O brethren, these are small, small matters: not worth the introduction of discord among a united people; not worth the trouble and sorrow of a few humble Christian hearts!

You see, brethren, I have given my sermon to just the one thing, the Place of Praise in the Worship of God. Do I need to say, as I conclude, that no music, however fine, is true praise, unless it come from devout hearts? We are to "worship in spirit and in truth:" without that, all worship, all praise, is vain! And in

our praise, as in our prayers, you know Whose help we must ask, if we would have either prayer or praise cheering and hearty. It is well to most carefully prepare the music for each Lord's-day: well to most carefully consider what tunes shall best suit the words to be sung, catching and interpreting their spirit: well that each worshipper should arouse himself to a real and energetic joining in the act of worship, as something not to be done for him by any other: and most fit and right that those in every congregation to whom nature and training have given the talent, with special power and beauty to sing God's praise, should take a special part in leading the praises of their fellow-worshippers: for never can musical talent be better occupied than when it is given to such a work. But while diligently using all such means to the great end of worthy praise, let us never forget that only the Holy Ghost present in our hearts, can warm them with that unearthly fire, that shall reveal its presence in the tones of such praise, as makes the sacrifice that pleases God and blesses him that offers it. And surely, if we have the good hope through grace, that our sins are washed away in Christ's blood, and that the Blessed Spirit dwells in us daily, we have good reason for the heartiest praise: joining our voices to those of angels and archangels, in the new song whose words we are told: "Thou art worthy: for Thou wast slain, and hast redeemed us to God by Thy blood out of every kindred and tongue and people and nation: and hast made

us unto our God kings and priests: and we shall reign on the earth."

They sing the Redeemer's praises There, with perfect hearts, and worthier music: but they sing them still. In the better world, in the Golden City, where the best of the Church and the Race are already gathered, we shall (if it please God to bring us Thither) continue the work begun here. And almost the only thing we can do here, in which we are sure we anticipate a little of the occupation of happy spirits, is the singing of our Blessed Redeemer's praise.

"The saints, triumphant in Thy love,
Their mighty joys we know:
They sing Thy praise in hymns above,
And we in hymns below."

VII.

THE SPIRITUAL PERILS OF WEALTH.

"And the common people heard Him gladly."—
ST MARK xii. 37.

OUR Blessed Saviour, while the days of His ministry were going over, preached to all kinds of people. In the course of His ministry He came in contact with all classes of society. Great crowds sometimes gathered to listen to His sermons: but many people seem to have come out of mere idle curiosity; and some came from worse motives;—some came with malice in their hearts, to watch His words for occasion to misrepresent and abuse Him. We are almost wearied, as we read the Gospels, at the perpetual story of the scribes and pharisees trying to entangle Him in His talk: hearing just to find fault: and there is something cheering in such a statement as that in the text, which tells us there *was* a class of people,—a large class of people, who listened to our Lord's instructions, on some occasions at least, in a very different spirit. The polished and courtly Her-

odian might turn away with contempt from the preaching of the carpenter's son : The scribes and pharisees might carp and catch at the unauthorized man, who set folk all in a ferment by His new interpretations of the Law; but there was a certain order of people more easily to be won; and so we read that "the common people heard Him gladly."

We have reached an age in this world's history, in which Christianity has gained its firm footing among the well-to-do and the wealthy, as well as among those whom God has favoured less in the matter of worldly estate. And every wise man, with the interest of his country at heart, will rejoice to find, in the house of God, the place in the parish where the rich and poor meet together on the grand level of sinfulness by nature and salvation through Christ; and will esteem it, too, one of the most ominous signs of approaching disintegration of society, should any malign influence come in to make the rich, and the sycophants of the rich, choose to worship apart from the mass of their fellow-Christians. And I shall never hesitate to say, that in my solemn judgment, even should the worship which the mass of their fellow-Christians prefer, be of a ruder and less æsthetic type than that which they themselves might choose, the rich, if they would not make that gulf far wider which is far too wide already, are bound to make some sacrifice of personal liking at the altar of patriotic duty: and, as they submit to the inconveniences of

a Northern climate, to conform their practice to Northern national tastes.

But, in these days, when we sometimes hear mention made of such things as "fashionable churches" and "genteel congregations,"—for the most part spoken of by persons vulgar with the only hopeless and unimproveable vulgarity, the vulgarity of mind and heart,—it is interesting to look away back to the days when the first and greatest Preacher of the cross was going on through His earthly ministry; and to mark from what class in the social scale He drew His most attentive and unprejudiced hearers. *All* classes listened to Him, indeed: "Never man spake like this Man:" There was that about Him which could for the time enchain even the most prejudiced: but there was one class that listened with special interest to the words of the Redeemer: "The common people heard Him gladly." The labourer pausing from his toil; the fisherman turning from his nets; the woman with her pitcher at the well; plain people, with no great education and no great refinement; these were the kind of beings whose breast heaved and whose eye glistened at the Saviour's words. And when we put such words as those of the text together with such other as that remarkable declaration of our Lord's, that "hardly shall they that have riches enter into the kingdom of God,"—that "it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of

God,"—we cannot help feeling that, in sober earnest, there must be a great deal in the outward position in which a man may be placed, that will most seriously affect the way in which he shall receive the gospel. It does really seem to be taught us in these texts, and in many others which will readily suggest themselves, that there is something in a comparatively humble position in life, which tends to make a human being more likely to become a true Christian than if he were placed in a more elevated sphere. Now I wish that in this discourse we should look, fairly and temperately, at the matter: that we should try to estimate the comparative influence of different worldly places on the care of the soul's salvation: that we should see whether the rich man's wealth does not bring with it such spiritual disadvantages, as make it no possession to be much envied by his poorer brother: and see whether the poor man's homely fare and humble dwelling may not be abundantly compensated, by the increased facilities they give him, towards setting his affection on things above, and laying up his treasure there.

How was it then, that it came to be, that while the scribes and pharisees, the more courtly and elevated class among the Jews, listened commonly to our Saviour in so malignant a spirit; how was it that those less favoured by fortune "heard him gladly?" Of course it might be replied,—Oh, because they

were always ready to run after the last novelty: gaping curiosity would lead them to listen with interest to any new teacher who came to set out new doctrines: and they would be specially pleased to listen to one who treated with so little respect of persons those who judged themselves their betters. But it is perfectly plain, that there is something deeper than this surface view. I cannot but regard the text as something to remind us of that great truth, to which scripture and experience alike bear testimony, that if worldly wealth surrounds a human being with worldly comforts and advantages, it has in it that which tends so to affect his soul, as to make him run the Christian race as it were carrying weight, and fight the good fight of faith at a certain disadvantage. And if we were called to say what seems to have been the reason why it was the poorer sort that gave Christ His most sympathetic congregations and His earliest disciples: why the Saviour spoke so strongly as to the difficulty with which the rich man should enter the kingdom of God, and why St Paul reminded the believers at Corinth that "not many wise men after the flesh, not many mighty, not many noble, are called;" we should say because there seems to be something in a large expanse of creature comfort, that does tend to materialize the soul: because when all goes well with us, when every earthly prospect is bright, we are less likely to turn, as with childhood's longing for home, to another world; because every additional comfort

and blessing we have here, is another link to this life, that makes it harder to set our affection elsewhere. Not but what from the very profusion of all that time and sense can give, the lesson of its vanity has sometimes been learned most deeply; and the great need these immortal souls have for something never to be found till we find the good part in Christ that alone can satisfy the soul: but such cases as Solomon's are unquestionably exceptional ones: and we all know, from our own humble experience, what it is to feel as though life had gained a new value, and this world had grown a place we should be more sorry to leave, when something had come which signally improved our worldly circumstances. The thought, doubtless, has crossed us: Now we should like to keep this as long as we can. We should like to stay where we are: we are very well here.

Of course, you know that the foundation of all religion must lie in a settled preference of the interests of an unseen world above those of this world. The grand precept which underlies all Christian duty, and all care of the soul, is "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth." We are all called to make a choice between the things which are seen and the things which are not seen: as Christians by profession, we declare plainly that we seek a country, and confess ourselves no more than strangers and pilgrims on the earth. And it is very plain, that

whatever makes this world more satisfying and pleasing, must make it harder to make up our mind that this is not our rest, that our rest is beyond the grave. And it is very plain too, that whatever tends to make this world less satisfying and engrossing,—a less warm nest as it were for the affections and desires of our souls,—tends to make it less of an effort to break away from it, and to look mainly to the things which are unseen. We all remember the story of that rich and famous man, who was showing one day, with pride, to an early friend, his beautiful house, crowded with all that was conducive to comfort and pleasant to see: We all remember that old friend's answer: "Ah," he said, "these are the things that make death terrible!" But it seems as though it would be easier to bid this world farewell, in the comfortless abode of extremest poverty: we may contrast with those well-remembered words of the great English moralist, others, not less familiar, of our own great poet, that speak of "death, the poor man's dearest friend, the kindest and the best:" the messenger, often anticipated wishfully, that shall take away from a weary world, wherein the daily burden has often seemed too heavy to bear. Tell me, my friends, should even the humblest Christian envy the rich and great; or should he not rather look at them with a deep sympathy; as remembering how all the worldly splendours which dazzle men's eyes, are so many things to make it harder to lay up the treasure

above: as remembering how the noble mansion and the fair domain and the lavished luxuries, may each be a stumbling-block in the Christian race;—something to make high-minded, and to lead to trust in uncertain riches rather than in the living God;—something to lead to the awful risk, that having had "in this life their good things," they may find none in the other. And is there one of us, yea the most anxious, careworn, and disappointed, who will repine or fret at the trials sent by God, when he remembers that all these trials may be the discipline that enables him to sit loosely to the things of time and sense, and to feel himself indeed a pilgrim here: may be the discipline that saves our weak and wavering faith from a conflict for which it has not the strength: may be the discipline which (humanly speaking) has led to commit the soul to Jesus, and to seek and find salvation through Him!

And so it was, that one strong reason why they were chiefly poor and humble folk that listened gladly to the preaching of Christ, may have been that people of that class were perhaps likelier to feel the need of an unearthly trust to sustain them on their earthly way. The wealthy Pharisee, living in his comfortable dwelling, well-esteemed and well-to-do, was so pleased with this world, that really he did not so much feel that he needed any other. He would be ready, no doubt, to admit that there were many little vexations about this life; but still he would think to

himself that it was a good world in the main, "a happy world after all:" and it would not be easy to turn away from a place where he was so comfortable and respectable, and set his heart upon some distant shadowy state of being in a world beyond the grave. But it was different with the poor fisherman of Galilee, often in cold, hunger, and weariness: different with him who sat by the wayside begging: different with those who often found it a sore struggle to find their children bread to eat and raiment to put on: It sounded pleasant in their ears to be told of another world, where those who laboured and were heavy-laden might rest: where they should "hunger no more, neither thirst any more:" where the burden and heat of the weary day should be gone for ever. Yes: "the common people" then had not so much to link them to this life: When bidden to "lay up their treasure above," it did not cost such a struggle to turn away from a few old nets and boats: There was nothing so very winning about the ceaseless grind and sorry calculations of every-day life: Instead of wishing to cling to it, the thought had often come in, how happy it would be to have it all over: all over, in desponding moods, though nothing remained but a dreamless rest: and here there was the assurance of a bright and happy heaven!

You have walked forth, on a beautiful summer evening, in the gentle light and pleasant air: and quietly enjoying these, you have been sorry when the

hour came that summoned you indoors, and took you away from that soothing aspect of nature. But if it were a bitter, bleak December night, dark and tempestuous, how welcome the summons to the warmth and shelter within would be! And there are those favoured ones, to whom life is like the pleasant summer evening; not to be turned away from but with many a longing, lingering look cast behind. But what is this life to many, many not far from us now, but the bleak winter night from which it is good to pass into the inner quiet: and what this pilgrimage but a weary road, which they must traverse with naked feet, travel-sore and bleeding!

We have thought of one obvious way, in which the possession of wealth may be a hindrance, and the pressure of poverty a help, in the life of faith. But others suggest themselves readily. Not only do riches tend to engross the affections: not only does the deceitfulness of riches tend to choke the good seed, so that it becomes unfruitful: but their possession, at all stages, and especially in early youth, has oftentimes tended to pride and arrogance, to idleness and frivolity, to reckless dissipation and every form of degrading sin. Every now and then, some lamentable wreck of a life is pressed upon the public notice, coming as a case in point: some wreck of a life that under the salutary restraints of modest worldly means and the necessity of honest industry might have been

a happy and useful one; but which the early possession of wealth dragged through depths of folly and profligacy that made it a by-word and scandal, and brought to a miserable and dishonoured grave. And surely one who has led such a life, is greatly to be pitied as well as grievously to be condemned. Even when the evil and perilous tendencies of riches are not allowed so dismal a licence, we have all marked a moral deterioration come of them, which makes us feel that their possession is indeed a great temptation, needing a special measure of God's preventing and restraining grace. And it is singular to remark in what directions the evil tendencies of increasing wealth may be found to affect its possessor. We have known, for example, one whose liberality in giving to religious and charitable objects grew ever less the richer he grew. When a comparatively poor man, he gave liberally: the thought of accumulating a fortune had never presented itself: but when, gradually, fortune began to loom in the distance, he felt that he must strain every nerve to reach it, and cut down all unnecessary expense; and who does not know that the first expense which many men cut down is in their charities? Then, in another direction, with growing means comes the idea that a certain outward appearance is due to one's station in life: and this outward appearance, through a folly transparent to every one except to those guilty of it, is not unfrequently just a little beyond what can be

well afforded: so that people are really driven to shabbier shifts and more unworthy expedients with a large income than they ever were with a small one. And let me tell you, my friends, it is a bad sign of the unreality that is gathering about a great deal of our preaching; and of that pulpit cowardice which makes preachers sometimes condemn in their sermons every sin except those precise sins which they know to be prevalent in their congregations: that we so seldom hear from the pulpit a plain statement of the plain truth, that it is a primary religious duty that people should live within their incomes; and that to many, the sin that doth most easily beset them is the sin of spending what they have not honestly got to spend. Then, to look in another direction, we recall the inspired declaration, that "covetousness is idolatry:" and indeed it is so in a more literal sense than may always suggest itself: for, when we analyse it, we shall find that the hoarding spirit really founds upon an obscure, half-conscious belief in the mind, that invests wealth with the attributes of God: that sees in it that power to satisfy the soul, to provide for all wants, to assure against the possibilities of the Future, which abides only in our Redeemer Himself; and which can be laid hold of only by that simple faith, which trusts to Him and His great sacrifice, soul and body, life and death and immortality. But without following up the veins of thought thus indicated, which show us spiritual perils resulting from the pos-

session of worldly wealth, we may say, with entire confidence, that its possession has made many a man a far less reputable and useful member of society than he might have been; has made many an ear less open to the gospel message; has tended to keep the door of many a heart closed against Him, Who stands and knocks so patiently at the door of all. Many a lost creature, come to shameful ruin, might, had God set him where he must work for daily bread, have kept clear of those temptations, those companions, those excesses, which have drowned in destruction and perdition. You may have seen, among the brothers of one family, that brother to whom was given the great superiority (as it seemed) of great inherited fortune, break loose from all restraint, develop the vilest vices in heart and life, run a miserable career early cut short by unlamented death,—while the others, children of the same home, inheriting no better nature, being saved, by the salutary check of necessity to toil, from temptation which might have overmastered, have run the course of useful industry, of modest success, of Christian life and hopeful departure. There are very many, who will not steadily work unless compelled by God's providence: and only by steady work can the mind be kept healthful, the views sound, the life pure. And I suppose there can be no doubt, that the possession of wealth tends to make people proud: though why it should, it is really hard to see. For one would say that it

should rather make people thankful, and very humble: thankful to God Who has given so much to them so undeserving; very humble in the reflection by what right save God's will they should be so distinguished and favoured above their fellow-creatures, all meriting exactly as much. But I suppose the arrogance sometimes offensively manifest in rich folk, comes of their tacitly assuming the outrageously absurd notion, that they are as much better than others as they are better off than they. And there are spiritual frames and conclusions to which people come without the slightest reason: all one can say is that they seem natural: and possibly it is natural for the man who can pay his way, to look, with a complacent feeling of superiority, on the man who cannot: as unquestionably it seems to be natural, however inexplicable, that a man who is driving a swift horse, which passes all others on the road, should cherish some sense of superiority to the people he passes by. And if riches tend, with reason or without it, to make the soul proud, and to induce some contempt for others,—and that in some natures they do all that, we know,—then most true it is that they exert a most baneful influence on the soul's health, and its hopes of heaven. For if there be a sure thing in this world, it is that pride is not merely an inconceivably silly thing in us poor mortals, but that it is unutterably hateful in the sight of God; and vitally inconsistent with that repentance towards God and faith in Christ which can be only in

that soul which is "clothed with humility,"—yet without which salvation cannot be. For "God resisteth the proud, and giveth grace to the humble:" and who, that has head to think or heart to feel, but must see a hundred reasons why it must needs be so! Many frames of spirit there are that may be known by the believer; but the lowly one that finds utterance in the "God be merciful to me a sinner," must be known by all. Many paths there are by which the Blessed Spirit may lead human beings into the Church of Christ; but every soul that ever entered it, entered it by this lowly gate.

You see, my brethren, some of the spiritual perils that attend on wealth: some of the hindrances which he must overcome, who through much abundance of worldly good would enter into the kingdom of God. Of course, it needs not to be said, that what may be, what tends to be, is never to be confounded with what actually is: and that any one's outward circumstances are no index whatsoever to how he actually stands with God. The man who has most of this world's wealth, may yet by God's grace overcome all the temptations which wealth brings with it; and the poorest may set his affection on things below. There are those, rich alike in this world's wealth and in treasure laid up above: and many, the poorest in both. Let no poor man be in his heart revenging himself on the rich man he envies, by saying, as he looks on the rich man's luxuries and elegancies, Ah,

it is your turn now, but you shall smart for this hereafter: in this life you are receiving your good things, and I, like Lazarus, evil things: and the day is coming when I shall be comforted and you shall be tormented. I believe there is in the heart of all of us, as we look at people much better off than ourselves, a tendency to avenge ourselves upon them by thinking such hard thoughts as these: but nothing can be more unjustifiable than our doing so. The fact of a man's being rich or poor proves just nothing at all as to his actual state spiritually. It was not merely because Lazarus was a poor beggar and Dives a man who fared sumptuously every day, that they fared so differently in the other world. It might quite well have been that the rich man might have gone from his purple and fine linen in this life, to the bosom of Abraham in the other,—of Abraham, who was an exceeding rich man here. He might have had many temptations to contend with in leading a godly life; more than if he had not been so wealthy; but "the deceitfulness of riches" need not necessarily have "choked the word." It was because the beggar was a pious beggar, and the rich man a godless rich man, that things turned out as they did.

We have thus endeavoured, my friends, to look calmly at a difficult question; the effect of wealth and poverty upon the spiritual condition and prospects

of human beings. This is a matter as to which it is easy to take a one-sided view; but harder to take a temperate and just one. You will find, in the literature of the day, a good deal of extravagant statement as to the poor being generally much better than the rich: and you will find it sometimes broadly laid down, that if the poor be bad at all, it is mainly the fault of the wealthy. Doubtless, there is some grain of truth in this last: for we are each the keeper of all our brethren, in so far as we can: and for the neglect of providing education, for the neglect of many measures of moral prevention and cure, those are doubtless guilty who had it in their power to provide them,—though guilty, assuredly, rather through want of thought than through want of heart. And, where there is moral evil, the blame never lies at one door alone. As for the comparative virtue of classes, one, whom duty has led to know much of both rich and poor, may be allowed to say, that morally and spiritually, the goodness and badness of rich and poor are very much the same. The special type of good and evil will vary, as circumstances and temptations vary; but substantially, and at the root, good and evil are in their essence the same. You have witnessed, in human beings of the highest worldly rank, the most unaffected humility; and in those of the greatest worldly wealth that true poverty of spirit which God so much approves. And as there may be a very

meek and humble Archbishop or Duke, so there may be a very arrogant and presumptuous pauper. There is no worldly lot without its own temptations: and there is none through whose temptations God's grace may not safely guide to heaven. You remember how wisely Agur pointed out the risks that lie on either hand. We have thought, to-day, of the special risks which lie on the side of wealth: to the end that any among us who may be called rich should be set on their guard; and that the poor among us may see that their poverty is not an unmingled evil. And this is a case, indeed, in which I am not afraid that the strongest statement of scriptural doctrine will produce too great a practical effect. I do not expect that the perils which attend on wealth, will lead the rich to renounce their wealth, or the struggling to cease from their endeavours to grow wealthy. I do not expect that, nor wish it: but I would that these thoughts might impress on all a lesson of caution, of resignation, of charity; and lead each of us to seek for Divine grace to guard against that besetting temptation which arises out of our own special outward lot. I know well that there are probably few here to-day, who would not be content to run the risks of wealth, if they had the chance: very few who would refuse a handsome fortune, merely for the fear that it might injure the state and prospects of their soul. And I do not say that a Christian man is bound to shrink

away from the trial of wealth, should God send it; more than from any other discipline which it may please God to send. Only let us remember this: that should God deny us worldly riches, we have no reason to greatly repine; and that should God send us worldly riches, we may well stand in awe!

VIII.

INDIVIDUAL REASONS FOR FAITH AND LOVE TOWARDS GOD.

"God, before Whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk: the God Which fed me all my life long unto this day: the Angel Which redeemed me from all evil; bless the lads." —GEN. xlviii. 15, 16.

FAR away from this place, in the case of some; and not so far away, perhaps, in the case of others; there is a scene, a place, a little corner of the world; which each of us knows and remembers well. It is a spot so sweet, perhaps, that the traveller, passing by, stops; and looks long on the hills, the trees, the river. And all that beauty you have often looked at too: but it is not for *that*, that the thought of it keeps so close by your heart, and sometimes brings the tear to your eye. You know the place is beautiful: but it is not for that common beauty which every passer-by sees and shares in, that you care for it so much. No: it has for you a charm which it has for no one else: and it is more by a thousand times to you, than would be a scene in

itself a thousand times as charming. For it was there you spent those days of childhood, in which it seems at least to us looking back on them, as if the present knew no deep care and the future were all bright promise: it was there perhaps you drew your first breath: it was there you remember the first summer's green leaves, and the first winter's snow: it was in those woods you first plucked a primrose, in those fields you first sat under a blossoming hawthorn-tree. Not a spot there, but has its old story: not a path, but you have trod it in company with some friend that has long been dead. The house you dwelt in,—birth has gladdened it, death has hallowed it: your mother's voice still lingers about the old rooms, and the echo of your father's counsels and prayers. Your earliest cares, your earliest sports, your lightest-hearted days:—all these come back from the past, and the dead brothers and sisters that joined in them:—dead, if not in the grave, then in the grown-up man and woman. And why is it that the scenes of childhood are to all save some people of very exceptional character and history, so very dear? It is not that the fields are indeed greener, and the skies more bright, than in many a place beside: though sometimes you would almost fancy them so. But it is the old familiar faces: it is the associations of the last twenty, or fifty, or seventy years, that give that place its hold on your affections: it is because so much of yourself lies sweetly buried in it and its

memories, that it has for you a nameless fascination: it is, in short, for reasons connected with your own individual being and history that you love it as you do.

Now, my friends, I think I can discern in the words which form my text, something like the extension of this principle I have been trying to set out,—the principle that things, even things which in themselves are lovely, are loved less for their own inherent loveliness, than for reasons which link them with ourselves and those we love,—the extension of this principle from things and places to the great Creator of all. The aged patriarch Jacob, lying on his dying bed, would give his blessing to the children of his son: His eyes were dim with years, and he could not see them, but he laid his hands upon their head: and then, knowing well how little worth is man's blessing, he besought that upon the lads there might come down the blessing of God. It was a touching contrast, the dawn of life and the sunset together: the fresh youth of the children with life before them, and the feeble age of the grandfather who now desired no more in this world than to be buried where *his* fathers lay: and we do not wonder that Joseph "bowed himself to the earth" as his aged father blessed his little sons. And when the old man spake, you can see that his thoughts were going back over his own departed days: it seems as though he would gather into one all the thankfulness he bore his God

for all the good he had experienced in his life: it seems as though he would, in one deep-felt utterance, embody all the intensity of his affection for the young ones he blest, and all the fixedness of his trust in the kind and well-tried Benefactor and Saviour Whose blessing he besought on them: and so Jacob blest them, and said; "God, before Whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk: the God Which fed me all my life long unto this day: the Angel Which redeemed me from all evil; bless the lads."

But, my friends, what I ask you to remark in Jacob's blessing upon Ephraim and Manasseh, is neither the love it breathes towards his little grandchildren, nor yet the faith it shows in God: What I ask you to observe is, the light in which the patriarch desires to look at God; the manner of viewing God which plainly stirs the liveliest faith and the warmest love towards Him; the reasons touching *himself* which seem as if they linked him to God more closely than anything else could: in a word, the way peculiar and personal to himself in which it pleased him most and warmed his heart most to regard his Maker. He looks not to those incommunicable and mysterious perfections, which the great God has absolutely in Himself, and which He had ages on ages before Abraham and Isaac were born: No, he is more touched by those things which God had done in the last two centuries, than in all the eternity that went before: he looks more earnestly

at the goodness and power which have reached himself and his fathers, than at those which overspread the universe, reaching through endless time and infinite space. And so, when he thinks of God as One Whose blessing he would invoke upon his children's heads, he names Him not as the Great Creator, Whose word called countless worlds from nothing, each with its limitless crowds of life: Not as the Infinite Preserver, who is everywhere, and sustains everything: Not as the Eternal Self-Existent, Who was before time began, and will be after time is past, to Whom a thousand years are as one day. No: the heart gets wearied at these infinite thoughts, —wearied out and chilled: and the dying man lessens his view to a narrower but a warmer tract. His own little life, and that of his immediate parents, give him ground enough for faith the liveliest and thankfulness the deepest: The thought of God as connected with his own little history, warms the pausing heart that Infinity would only have perplexed; and gives him special reasons for loving and trusting his Redeemer, which might be nothing to others, but which were all the world to him. He felt that there was warmer meaning to himself and such as him, when he spoke of God as the God before Whom his fathers did walk, the God Who fed him all his life long, the Angel Which redeemed him from all evil,—than if he had striven to stretch out his mind to conceptions we might think more worthy of the Almighty Maker

and Ruler of the universe, and then tried to set his love on these. And so his heart is away at the long-past days he had heard so much of, when the father of the faithful trusted God so simply, and when Isaac meditated at the eventide: He runs over, in thought, the incidents of his own life, and views his God as connected with every one of them: He is back at the sad parting from that doting mother, whom he never saw more on earth: then away, with a heavy step and a heavier heart, on the road towards Haran: he dreams again the dream at Bethel; and though Rachel was dead and buried many a year ago, once more he meets her at the well in her first fresh beauty: then the years among the flocks of Laban: again by Jabbok ford he wrestles with the Angel all the night; and once more Esau whom he dreaded as a foe meets him as a brother. And as he comes further down the story, and remembers how wealth grew round him in his journey and his rest, how even deep sorrow led the way to joy, and passing evil wrought lasting good,—how the God of Bethel fed him all his days, and the Angel of the Covenant saved him from all evil;—the heart of the old man glows at the remembrance of the past: his faith grows firmer and his love grows deeper as he thinks of all the good his Saviour gave: and when he would give his children the best blessing he could frame the thought of, he says, The God Who did all that for me, do for them as much! He puts aside grand

and mystical things; and comes to a homely thought which every one can understand; when he says, Only let God be to my children, what He has been to me!

And now, my friends, that we have seen how the dying patriarch drew from the history of his own life, his most deeply-felt reasons for faith and love towards his God; let us consider whether *we* may not too, gain the like assurance from the like retrospect: whether we, as human beings and as individual beings, have not reasons of our own, apart from those arising from the mere essential character of the Almighty, for trusting Him simply, thanking Him daily, and reverently loving Him with heart and soul and mind. We cannot speak too humbly, speaking about God: but there is no lack of due reverence in saying that though we never forget that He is the Infinite, the Eternal, the Omnipotent, the Omnipresent, Who covers Himself with light as with a garment, Who makes the clouds His chariot, and walks upon the wings of the wind; still it is far happier, and it comes far more nearly home to us, sinful, weak, and anxious, to think of Him as the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ: to think of Him as God Who so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life: to think of Him as God Who has taken care of each one of us through all the days

we have lived, keeping us with a Father's care; supplying our wants, warding off innumerable dangers, truly interesting Himself in our little affairs, our burdens and sorrows: listening to our prayers: training us for a better world: pardoning our sins; sanctifying our hearts. David, Psalmist and King, knew the feeling; when he said "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits: Who forgiveth all thine iniquities; Who healeth all thy diseases; Who redeemeth thy life from destruction; Who crowneth thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies!"

My friends, when we set ourselves now for a little while to think of the reasons which we who are here met have in our own history for loving and trusting our heavenly Father; there is one which must be named first, though it is only in a certain sense that it ranks under the head of reasons of personal and individual concern for faith and love towards God. Yet, though it be not a reason that touches each separate one of us, as something which we have and which no one else has, still it is a reason which among all God's creatures that we know of, touches our race alone: it is a reason which we human beings have for loving and trusting God, over and above all those which we have in common with all other things He made: it is a reason peculiar to man as man. Of course you all know it. It is that God, of His great mercy, gave His Son to die for us: It is that the

Son of man came to seek and save us when we were lost. Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable Gift! It was for us men, and for our salvation, that our Lord came down from Heaven, and here lived and died. It is for us that the great gospel remedy is provided, with its atoning blood that takes away sin, with its sanctifying and comforting Spirit, with its glorious Resurrection, with its peaceful and home-like Heaven. This cuts us off from all other beings of whose existence we know. It makes us a class alone in the universe! No race beside, no being beside, has half the reason for loving and trusting God that you and I have, just this afternoon. No doubt, all are His servants: all things praise Him, in their degree. The heavens declare His glory; and all the earth doth worship Him. We can join with angels and archangels, and with all the company of heaven, saying Holy, Holy, Holy, Lord God of hosts: Heaven and earth are full of Thy glory. But we can add words of faith and hope and love which are not theirs; saying "He that spared not His own Son, but delivered Him up for us all, how shall He not with Him also freely give us all things!"

And now, let us narrow the circle to which we have been seeing the rays of the Divine mercy converge: we have seen them come to a focus, as it were, upon our Race: let us next regard them, as Jacob dying did, centred on our individual selves. True it is, that the human race means just the

separate persons who compose it: when "God so loved the world," *that* means He so loved each poor creature here: but yet to most minds it seems as if God's love got dissipated among the multitude, when they think of it as extending to the human family, or to His chosen people: and they can realise more sensibly a ground of confidence and love, when they call to memory some special deliverance that was wrought out for their very selves,—some time when God seemed to remember them particularly, and to bless them alone;—than when they think of great broad blessings that (like the sunshine) rested on them and millions more along with them; and that did not so immediately call up the thought of care and kindness towards individual beings. Now this is natural: you see Jacob had the feeling strongly: Although he takes to begin with no wider circle than that made by his father and grandfather, he leaves *that;* and he has two clauses in his blessing naming his God in relation to his own self: "The God Which fed *me:* the Angel Which redeemed *me.*" And there is no selfishness, in any evil sense of it, in feeling that there is something that touches us very closely in the remembrance of a mercy vouchsafed by the great God to our own self: something cheering in thinking of Him indeed listening to the prayer we utter in our need,—hearing *us* "in heaven his dwelling place;" amid all Its unimaginable praise: something wonderful in believing that, if only for once, *we*

were singled out from all the untold millions God is sustaining,—that He looked at us, and thought what would be good for us, and turned to *that* His Almighty power! Such a blessing seems more specially our own: it takes away that desponding feeling which even the Psalmist felt in the contemplation of the multitude and vastness of the creatures God made and sustains,—the feeling that even our Race, and far more ourselves, are lost in the immensity of creation,—that we are too little to merit or get one look or thought from the mighty Maker and Ruler of all. And it is not vain self-conceit, but thankful humility, that emboldens the sinner to say, "I am poor and needy, yet the Lord thinketh upon me." Now each of us may say, with entire assurance, that the Lord has thought upon us, many times. For besides those gifts which we have each received from His hand but which others have received together with us; every one of us can look back, like Jacob, upon the history of our past life, and see there many a mercy, many a deliverance, many a point where we were wonderfully guided right when we were ready to go grievously wrong. We cannot tell how much Almighty God has interposed on our behalf: how often the great machinery that turns the universe has been quickened or slackened in its speed, all for our sakes: for we do not know how often unutterable anguish was near us, how often overmastering temptation and bitter shame: we do not know how often death had his skeleton

hand raised above us, and a power unseen, unfelt, has taken us away before it could fall. Yet we remember some things. Looking back, we see times when death looked out of his ambush, just as we escaped it: we see narrow escapes, hair-breadth chances, times when we swam for our life, times when we were nearer our end than we ever shall be again till it comes at last. They began when we were infants in the nurse's arms: just think from what countless things that might each have cut short our little thread a hand unseen must have saved us, before we emerged from that dawn of existence, and began to walk for ourselves along life's perilous ways! And then youth with its hopeful aspirations, manhood with its many cares; each of these had its host of known and unknown dangers and temptations, its host of more or less clearly discerned interpositions of the protecting and restraining hand of God. I would need, my friends, to make this touch you as it ought, to accurately know the life's history of each of you: it would need here, to make you feel as you should, a separate sermon for each of you: it would need that I should be able to look into each heart, and see it recalling the days that are gone, and point out here and there the occasions on which some providential escape, some striking deliverance from peril that threatened body or soul, made it plain to even the worldly eye, that a kind unseen hand was leading steps that seemed led by no hand, and saving

from evil that you just saw terrible,—inevitable,—past! One fell from a window from his mother's arms, and was taken up unhurt. One was at the last drowning struggle, when help came and he was saved. A vein burst, and your last blood was running, but help came and you were saved. You were to have embarked in some brave vessel; but some annoying accident marred your purpose; and the brave vessel sailed away and was never heard of more. The bullet that would have killed you whistled close by your head, but it hurt you not. You lay upon your fevered bed, and the hot blood throbbed through and through you: and at last the physicians gave you up and your friends said farewell to you: then in the stillness of the dying chamber they listened for the feeble breath, and looked with the awe which watchers by the dying know at the timepiece, calmly measuring out the last minutes: But the night hours wore away, the morning dawned through the dim window, the pulse was beating yet, and beating stronger, the physicians changed their mind about you, and hope came back, and strength, and health, and life was yours again! I wish heartily that I could say something that would make each soul here vividly recall only one of the many times when God delivered you from danger and death; and make you feel that *that* was a sign, sure as ever warmed the dying heart of Jacob, that the great Father above us was looking down just on

you yourself, to save and bless you. And would God that each one of us, taught by God's Spirit, might so read the history of his life to this day, as to see in it one long testimony that God has guided, fed, and saved us: so that, with grateful hearts, we may set up our Ebenezer, saying "Hitherto hath the Lord helped us:" so that, with faith's sound logic, we may reason from the past to the future, saying "The Lord hath been mindful of us: He will bless us still!"

But until now, my Christian friends, speaking of God's special care of us, and of our individual reasons for faith and love towards Him, I have spoken mainly of the common care of His providence. But deeper still the meaning grows, and stronger the force of the reason, when we think of His dealings with His children in the higher realm of grace. O brethren, if you can remember the time, wherein, perhaps gradually, perhaps almost suddenly, the God of all grace apprehended you as you walked the heedless path of worldliness and folly;—showed you your lost estate by nature and by sin,—showed you Who came to seek and save the lost,—gave you a hearty penitence and a living faith,—worked in you by the power of the Holy Ghost a new heart and a right spirit, with peace in believing, and rest for the weary soul; then in those gracious dealings with you, you will have your own best reasons for trust and love and never-ceasing

thankfulness. You know the way by which your God has led you: You remember how it was, when that Blessed Saviour Who had long stood at the door and knocked, had at last the door of the heart opened wide for His kindly entering: when the Gospel message, long a vague and little-regarded sound, was borne in upon you in its divine power: and you never can forget those seasons of peaceful communion, when the Blessed Spirit lifted you up as into a quiet region where worldly cares and burdens are unfelt; nor those times of deep distress and overwhelming bereavement in which you were sure, if you were ever sure of anything, that the Comforter, Which is the Holy Ghost, sympathising, homely, Almighty, came with His strong consolation, and His grace that sanctifies while it cheers. You know the way by which the God of grace has led you: Not the way, many times, that we should have chosen for ourselves; But if we have truly committed ourselves to our Saviour's guidance, always the right way, that will lead to the city of habitations at the last. You are journeying towards the land of light, perhaps through many dark days; through many anxieties, many failures and repentances: all needful, all needful! Yet, Christian friends, you have, in all your experience of your Saviour, your earnest and assurance, that in life and death and immortality, He will never fail nor forsake! You knew a little of His grace and love, when first you committed your soul

to his keeping: but you know Him far better now: and, speaking from personal trial, you can take for your own the grand Gospel development and consummation of the Old Testament patriarch's confession of his faith: saying, as St Paul said before you, "I know Whom I have believed; and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him, against that day!"

Now may God, before Whom all our fathers did walk, walking more worthily of Him than we: the God Which fed us all our life long unto this day: the Angel of the Covenant, the Blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, Which redeemed us from all evil, by the blood of His cross and the purifying of His Spirit; bless us all!

IX.

CHRIST'S KNOWLEDGE OF HUMAN NATURE.

"For He knew what was in man."—St. John ii. 25.

I DOUBT not, my friends, we have all sometimes thought, when walking along some street of a strange city, and looking at the succession of new faces that meets one there,—How very little a part it is that we see of a man when we look at him: How very little a part of that, which makes the real rational immortal being is apparent to our senses. We see the outside of him: form and features: and there are some things about him that we can gather from that. We can make a guess at his age: we can even form some idea as to his disposition,—whether frank or reserved, mild or blustering, strong or weak. But of the specialties of his nature, intellectual and moral,—of those things about him which mark him off from other people and make him the individual man he is,—of all these we remain in blank ignorance. We can, indeed, judging from what we are and from what we feel ourselves, form some rude notion, some

rough general impression, even of the people who form that passing crowd, which stands in our remembrance as a vision of faces seen for a moment once, and then seen no more: There are some great landmarks to go by, in judging even of one of whom we know for certain nothing more than that he wears our human likeness. We may take it for granted that trials and disappointments will weigh him down, and success and prosperous times make him glad and hopeful: we may assume, without much risk of going wrong, that light seems to him pleasanter than darkness, and the society and converse of his kind than enforced solitude: and we may be nearly sure that in his heart, after all worldly wear, there are still remembrances, buried perhaps deep under the rubbish of after years, of the time when a mother's hand smoothed down that head, old now and gray; and when, with face bowed upon her knee, he solemnly repeated, half lesson, half petition, the unforgotten words of childlike prayer. Sad, indeed, is his lot; and great the disadvantage at which he goes on through life; who has not some such store of kindly remembrance, brightening departed days.

But though it be thus true, that the great points of human character are set, so to speak, and its great lines drawn;—and thus that we can judge something about even the countless and nameless millions that have lived and died since the world began,—a something we judge just on the solemn principle, that the

man of whom you know nothing save that he lived and died, "was whatever you have been, and is what you shall be,"—still it remains true that our knowledge is very small and very indefinite of the fellow-creatures we only see; and even of those whom we meet and converse with day by day. And more: so imperfect are our insight and sympathy, that we do but imperfectly understand even those who are nearest and best understood: there are great tracts of mental mood and feeling, incommunicable by language,—certainly uncommunicated: known fully to no other being than the one in whose experience they are. You have thought and felt far more, every one of you, than you have ever been able to tell. If you had been able, each of you, to tell out all you have thought and felt, you would have reached the heart of your fellow-creatures as only great geniuses do. For it is the gift of genius to be able to tell what all have felt; and to say what numbers have thought.

Now the statement made in the text concerning our Blessed Redeemer, seems as though it could not rightly be understood as meaning anything less than that, by the exercise of divine power, He read the human heart and soul. This is not the mere ascription of a singular penetration, coming of a singular shrewdness and experience; like that which enables a man, here and there, to discern in a startling way what people are thinking about: to read into character: to judge in a wonderful way what a human

being is to come to, in whom as yet only the faint rudiments of *that* yet appear: to discover weaknesses, and strong points too, of which the person in whom they exist is quite ignorant: in short, to take the measure of folk and their capacities and pretensions in a fashion far more wonderful than pleasing. It is not a power of acute reasoning that St John ascribes to our Saviour, but a power of direct intuition; when he says of our Lord in that short but significant text, that "He knew what was in man." It is Divine knowledge that is spoken of here. It was no temporary and communicated gift, like that which enabled some, in the early days of the Church, to discern spirits, now and then, in some special case, for some special reason, and apparently to a limited degree. But our Redeemer, God and Man, always and everywhere, in the exercise of His divine power, looking upon the face read the heart: knew not only the actualities but the possibilities of each soul He made. The text means, not a general acquaintance with the laws and habitudes of the soul of the race, like that which the metaphysician possesses: but it means a particular and most intimate acquaintance with the inward thoughts, feelings, purposes, of each separate individual. There have been those who knew man, but did not know men: who had remarkable insight into the nature and capacities of humanity in general, yet singularly failed to understand just the individual beings with whom they had to deal, and

how to handle them and manage them: But as for our Lord, He possessed, in perfection, both these kinds of knowledge: read with equal facility the common mind, and the exceptional development or manifestation. He knows, as no other does, each of you here: your secret thoughts, your secret faults: your unknown resistances of temptation: your many cares, your blank disappointments, your great desolating sorrows; and the very pang, or dull dead weight, with which each presses on your soul. No doubt, He has seen reason to think worse of each of you than those around you think; but sometimes, perhaps, better of you too. But He knows all you are: all you think of: all you can do: all you may grow. *That* is what is meant, when we read that "He knew what was *in* man."

And how wonderful a knowledge that is: what a revealing of secrets! Cast a pebble into the deep sea; and the tide, years after, may give it back to man's view. Hide away the embalmed monarch in the solid pyramid's heart: and thousands of years after, a new race may find him out in his resting-place. But give a secret to the soul of a resolute man; and a silence deeper than the grave's has engulfed it. It has gone down where no lead can fathom, where no grappling-iron can catch, where no eye can see. Ah, it is God's alone prerogative to know what is *in* man!

And now, thinking of the different shades of

sense contained in my text, let me suggest, that Christ knew and knows all the possible of exertion and execution there is in man: All that man can do.

Even a man himself does not know till he tries,—does not know till he learns by actual experience, what he can do. I doubt not that such a one as Milton, as page by page his great work took form and colour, wondered, as another might have done, at the mine of mental wealth that had lain unwrought and unsuspected within him, till he was far advanced in years: and that Newton, as step by step his majestic views unfolded themselves, wondered how he had been led to them,—though that great man's modesty would have disclaimed the explanation afforded by that true inscription beneath his statue in the College where he studied, which speaks of him as one "who in understanding excelled the human race."* It is a small thing to say that the Eye that sees what is in man, saw *Paradise Lost* in the infant Milton; and the Theory of Gravitation in Newton on his mother's knee. But indeed, my friends, we do not know ourselves what a deal there is in us, how much we can do, how much we can bear, how much we can dig and quarry out of our minds, till we try: and oftentimes the actual result strikes ourselves with just as much wonder as it does any other. What a

* "Qui genus humanum ingenio superavit." The statue stands in the Ante-chapel of Trinity College, Cambridge.

great fund of patient endurance and helpfulness has many a gay young creature found lay unsuspected in her, just when the trying time came to call it forth: the time of sickness in the household, the time of unlooked-for poverty and need for exertion! What an amount of stern resolution and action did he discover, as if by chance, within himself, who could say in youth, and say honestly, that he had no ambition;—that all he wanted was to devote his life to the quiet study of mathematics;—yet who took his place in history as the famous Emperor Napoleon. But all that potential of exertion and execution, He knew, Who knew what is in man. And not merely the budding promise of greatness, which was destined to expand into fame and success; but all that which was *in* men, who died without its ever coming out: all that fire of genius which hard circumstances quenched and kept down,—the mute inglorious Miltons,—the Glasgow student, with everything against him, who easily surpassed in scholarship one whom scholarship and good sense have just made Archbishop of Canterbury, but who died while his beaten competitor lived and rose: * the stifled aspirations of the Michael that built no St Peter's, and of the Vandyck that never got beyond his sixpence a day: the logic of the Follett that never held a brief, and the eloquence of the Chalmers that died while in the Divinity Hall: all these, though the world never

* James Halley, "the man who beat Tait."

knew nor cared to know them, *He* knows, Who knows "what is in man!"

But though all this is unquestionably true, it is rather matter of curious interest than of practical bearing on our spiritual life: and we go on to other thoughts of grave and solemn suggestion. One of these is, that Christ knows the possibilities of Evil, of sin and misery, that are in every fallen human being.

Speaking of our Saviour humbly, as we ought to speak, we may yet without presumption say, that it was this especial knowledge of what there is in man, that weighed heavily on Christ's heart through all His life here, making Him above all sorrowful that ever have been on earth, the "Man of sorrows:" and that urged Him on in His great redeeming work. For it was because He knew what depths of loss, of sin and misery, lie before the unredeemed soul of man, that He was so terribly earnest to seek and save. And He, who "bore our griefs and carried our sorrows," on Whose sinless Head God "made to meet the iniquities of us all," knew, as no other ever did, the awful possibilities of human sin and sorrow. It will not do, in the easy-going way of some now, to set these things out of our view: It was no light doom that our Lord saw, when He beheld Jerusalem and wept over it; or when, groaning in Himself at the sight of a death and all it suggested, He came to the grave of Lazarus: It was no tolerable possibility

of anguish and remorse that He was bent to keep away from us poor sinners, when He submitted to the unutterable Agony of Gethsemane, and the untold extremity of suffering He bore on the Cross. In all His agony to save, you see, among many other things, what a solemn knowledge He had of how much there was to save from! And indeed you remark that the text refers first to the evil which Christ knew to be in man: the Evangelist tells us that Christ did not trust Himself even to some who seemed impressed by His miracles, because "He knew what was in man:" what fickleness no doubt, what falsehood, what ingratitude, what capacity of treachery. Surely these are serious thoughts: they should lead each of us to seek most earnestly to assure his own personal salvation, and that of all dear to him, and that of all! How earnest ought to be our prayers, how real our endeavours, to win Christ and be found in Him: to have our sins forgiven and so be saved from sin's curse: to have our souls sanctified and so be saved from sin's power! The possibility whose knowledge weighed so heavily on the soul of Christ,—what limit is there to the real earnestness with which we should strive to be delivered from it! And, looking to the weakness of our best purposes, and the many temptations that come across us,—the poor and unworthy thoughts and affections that spring up within, and the abounding occasions for all these that are always presenting

themselves without,—how constantly should each one here pray for God's grace and His Holy Spirit! My friends, I would not speak in exaggerated terms: and I believe and hope that just as our circumstances, during the part of our life past, have saved us from temptation to very gross and crying sin, so our commonplace and guarded lot will do the like in time coming: It is all in a fallen man to become, with due temptation, a murderer or a thief; but to these depths of evil we have not been tempted and (let us pray) will not be: Yet, with all this reservation, there is that possibility of sin and woe about us, which should make each stand in awe, watch and pray; and humbly thank and bless God that we have been kept free from the great transgression. It was a reasonable saying, as well as a memorable one, that of the faithful minister, who said, as he looked at a wretched criminal going to the scaffold, "There goes myself, but for the grace of God!" And thinking of some, who promised fairly for long, but made wreck of their Christian profession, O let him that standeth take heed lest he fall: thank God for the past, and pray God for the future! You know not at how many points in your journey hitherto you have been within a hair's-breadth of taking the turn to ruin: and only by constant watchfulness, constant prayer for God's grace, can you hope to be kept from turning aside to destruction at many points in the way to come. It was He, Who

knows what is *in* man, that said, with so solemn appreciation of the risks that hang over us, "Watch and pray, that ye enter not into temptation!"

Let us think, next, that our Redeemer's knowledge of what is in man, extends into a more hopeful region of possibility yea of certainty: He knows the possible of good, of holiness and happiness, of glory and perfection, that is in the redeemed and renewed soul.

And truly amid the humiliations and failures, the sins and sorrows, of this troublesome life, it is hopeful and encouraging to think, How good and happy man may grow. "It doth not yet appear," either to others or to ourselves, "what we shall be:" but the Redeemer knows. And it is in us sinful creatures, sinful no more but glorified, that He is yet to "see of the travail of His soul, and be satisfied." Doubtless, even in the true beginnings of grace, there is little appearance of coming glory: It is there, all there; but only as the acorn implies the great branches and green leaves. For the root of the matter may be, where much natural evil lingers: and even God's grace often leaves, to the last, much that is unamiable, in the case of some who were not amiable from the first: much that is foolish, in the case of very sincere believers who were fools to begin with: much that is bitter, unfair, uncharitable, and even dishonest, in human beings with true zeal for what they honestly think Christ's cause: and how

different all these people will need to be, when they enter Heaven! You cannot suppose a soul in Heaven so sulky, that no one would ever speak to it who could help it: but it is unquestionable that there are good Christians in this world, to whom no one would speak if they could help. And even the rare believer who adds the beauty of saintly holiness to a beautiful amiability of nature and to all the graces of the finest culture, will yet sometimes show that the old man is not quite crucified: break out into thoughts, words, doings, that would not do in Heaven. But though the best believer is not now holy enough for the Home above, you cannot say anything from that. He will be so. "The souls of believers are at their death," if never before, "made perfect in holiness." And there are many analogies to the great regenerating and sanctifying change. Look at an acrid sloe: does that look like the peach which cultivation can bring it to? Look in the factory at a mass of rotting flax: is *that* anything like the finest of man's textile fabrics that it may be made to? Look at a mass of rusty iron: is there any promise there of the delicate mechanism of a watch's wheels and springs? And so, in the penitent soul, bowed down on account of sin, trembling in the presence of the God Who hates sin, there is little promise of the glorified spirit, perfect in holiness, and desiring no greater happiness than to be for ever with the Lord. In the sharp, white face of the dying believer,—or in

the mouldering clay, there is little promise of the spiritual body, raised incorruptible and immortal. But in the proud self-righteous persecutor of the church, there was just as little of the great apostle of the Gentiles. In the traitor that profanely denied his Master, there was little promise of the fearless St Peter; who, when his day of martyrdom came, was allowed the choice of the manner of his death; and chose the cruellest he could think of, that he might fare worse than his Lord. In the wretched blasphemer of the African coast, there was no appearance of the zealous minister of Christ, John Newton; and in the wild cursing tinker of Bedford no promise that he, in God's good time, should write that most familiar volume, which sets out with a charm so wonderful the progress of the soul in its pilgrimage towards God. But these are cases which time has cleared up, and that even we now see the end of: and it touches ourselves more nearly, to think that He who in other days saw how much more was to be made than appeared at first, of St Paul, St Peter, Newton and Bunyan and multitudes more, sees yet the first promise of the happy saint in many a soul where the eye of man could make out very little appearance of it now. In the narrow-minded ignorant believer now, *we* can see no trace of the untrammelled understanding of the spirit set free from prejudice and error; and in the bitter partizan sectary, not entirely careful to speak the truth of those who

differ from him, in whom yet is found, though sorely overgrown with misapprehension and ill-feeling, the root of the matter, we can see little promise of that perfected love, in which he will yet spend eternity with those whom here, pharisee-like, he held at arm's-length, and regarded only as rivals and opponents. But He, Who knows what is in man, and what the Blessed Spirit can make of man, can discern even now, looking over the harvest-field which is the world, true grace growing under the most unpromising forms: and ripening towards glorious developments never suspected here.

And now, passing from these thoughts, let us think how fit it was, that our Lord should so perfectly know what is in man: that the Good Physician of souls should know so thoroughly well the entire nature and constitution of the beings for whose worst disease and sorest need He was to minister. It is plain to common sense, that before you set yourself to remedy any state of things, you ought to know the best and the worst of it: before you think of the cure for a disease, you ought to be sure you are not mistaking it for another: before you can take steps with profit for the mending of a sick man, you must understand his constitution and his complaint. If you were seized by alarming illness, of course the first thing the physician would wish to know would be exactly what was the matter with you: And you would be prompt

to inform him of all you could: For it might be that if you kept any one symptom out of his knowledge, you might be suppressing just the very thing it was most essential he should know. And yet, it has happened, that in spite of all the penetration of a human physician, some little thing has come out, too late, that altered the aspect of the case; and showed perhaps that a wrong course of treatment had been followed all the while. But let us think, brethren, with faith and thankfulness, that when the Physician of souls comes and looks on you, He needs not to wait till He draws from your unwilling lips the sorrowful relation of the symptoms of the soul's disease. You cannot deceive Him as to your state, though you wished to do it: And many there are who if they could, would cheat Him into the belief that they are not so deadly sick; not such very great sinners after all. But your spiritual being is transparent to Him: He sees where head is sick and heart is faint: He takes in the whole truth at a glance. And many as are the forms of the one great soul-disease, there is but the one great Remedy for all. The great Atonement, with its good news of sins pardoned through Christ's Sacrifice and souls renewed by the Holy Spirit's working, suits all cases and mends all ailments. "The blood of Jesus Christ cleanseth from all sin."

My friends, though upon this day, instead of being here in this familiar place, at home, I were speaking to a congregation of utter strangers;—though I knew

no more of you that I could learn from seeing you sitting there, in God's house: I could yet say, with entire confidence, that be your soul's case what it may, you have, in the message of mercy through Christ, that which exactly suits it. Whatever right thing it is you want or wish this day, come to Jesus, and you will find it in Him! Are you subject to the curse as transgressors?—Here is Pardon. Are you weak and sinful?—Here is all-sufficient grace. Are you sometimes sorrowful and oppressed with care?—Here is strong consolation. Are you dying creatures, you and all you care for? He is the Resurrection and the Life. Now, believe it, brethren, all this is not something to put aside, as all very right: sound doctrine, and the right kind of thing with which to conclude a sermon,—but far away from our actual daily life, with its substantial interests, and its many cares. Believe it, brethren, other things are the vanishing shadows, that will go when we waken up from this dream: There is nothing so real in this world as the Atonement that is in Christ: nothing that should come so thoroughly home to us. And as we call to mind, each of us, how well our Redeemer knows us, let us remember, too, the kindly, hopeful way in which Holy Scripture, both Old and New, puts that perfect knowledge. We can all imagine how Christ's perfect knowledge might be used as a threat: might be held over us as a rod. "I know you," said by God Almighty to sinful man, might be

words of fear! "I know you," might convey that He knows how bad we are, how guilty, how ungrateful! It might mean all that: and said by man to man, it *does* oftentimes mean *that* and more. But, blessed be God's Name, it does not mean that now. It has not meant *that* for these three thousand years. What said the Psalmist of God's knowledge of us? Only that it leads Him to think of us the more kindly. "Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear Him. *For He knoweth our frame:* He remembereth that we are dust." And when better and happier days dawned upon this sinful and sorrowful world: when a clearer light came than David ever knew: when mercy and love were shown in our Blessed Saviour, that transcended far even "the sure mercies of David;"—then the great Apostle Paul was inspired to speak even more hopefully of our Redeemer's knowledge of us; making it not merely no reason for shrinking away from Him who reads our heart so truly, but actually a reason for humbly yet confidently drawing near Him. No doubt, St Paul tells us, that the Word, which was with God and was God, is "a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart." No doubt, he tells us still, that "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in *His* sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of Him with whom we have to do." But what is the Apostolic lesson from all this? Is it that we, thus known so well, had best shrink away

from an inspection we can bear so ill? Just the very reverse of that! He knows us through, but He knows us kindly: He reads our nature, but He reads it with a brother's sympathetic eye. "For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, but without sin. Let us therefore come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace to help in time of need."

Wherefore, my friends, we thank God this day, that our Saviour knows what is in us; that there is nothing in our soul's case that is hidden from Him: But that He knows it, only that He may the more truly sympathise; and the better comfort, guide, help, sanctify, save. And let us each take for our own the Psalmist's ancient prayer: "Search me, O God, and know my heart: Try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting!"

X.

HEARING.

"Take heed therefore how ye hear."—ST LUKE viii. 18.

I LATELY read, in a publication of no small ability and authority, a statement to the effect that there is something utterly and radically wrong about the present way in which men preach the gospel: and I have sometimes wondered whether that be really so. One would say, that if you went and began to talk to a man about something of great importance to him,—and which he knew was of great importance to him;—as for instance about how his life was to be saved when he was sick,—or how his family was to be kept from want after he was dead, —or how his house was to be saved from destruction when it was on fire; one would say that if you went and began to talk to a man about such matters as these, he would at least listen very attentively to what you had to say to him. Well, then: in every sermon we hear, the preacher is just a friend who has come to talk to us about something far more important than anything of that kind can be. He has come to tell

us how we may be saved from a disease a thousand times worse than consumption, or fever, or apoplexy: He has come to tell us how every poor man may provide for his family so completely, that he may be sure they shall never want for anything: He has come to tell us how we may save our houses and ourselves from fires far more destructive than ever destroyed in an hour the work of laborious years. Well, we all know that too: and yet, strange to say, there is nothing whatsoever to which many people listen so carelessly as a sermon. You all know quite well that it is so. Why, the very name of a sermon conveys to many people the idea of something extremely drowsy, stupid, and dull. The real feeling in many minds when the discourse is ended, is one of gentle, unexpressed relief. And perhaps it is a fact which some of you have not heard of before, that a very famous preacher, who many years since published a volume of sermons, was so conscious of the prejudice against the name, that upon the title-page of his book, he described his discourses as "Orations:" and then in his Preface said that the reason why he had selected that odd title was, that he knew that if he had called his discourses "Sermons," there would have been something in the very name that would have kept people from reading his volume; or that would have made them grow drowsy, after having read a very few pages. And so it was, that Dr Edward Irving wanted, as it were, to smuggle

his sermons into circulation under a wrong name; as doctors sometimes give wholesome medicine to children, without letting them know what it is they are taking.

Now, a stranger to our world might well wonder why this should be so. If any of you went and talked to any other person, you would think it only common civility that he should listen to what you had got to say. It would be a transgression of the laws which regulate our intercourse with one another, if you were by your manner to convey even to a person who was telling you something of very small importance, that you did not think it worth while to pay the slightest attention to what he said. You would, in all ordinary cases, listen to every word he addressed to you, though there were nothing in the very least degree striking or interesting in his conversation. Or, if a crowd of people assembled to a Concert of Music; or to listen to one of those Lectures on scientific or social subjects, which are a feature of these days; you would not see a person asleep in all the room: and every person present would listen to every word of the lecture and every note of the music. Now, let us just think of it; and say, Why should it be, that it is so very different when people go to church? I am sure you all know perfectly well, that in a great many churches not one person in six seems to join in or even listen to the prayers; and an exceedingly small fraction of the

congregation listens attentively to the entire sermon. I know I have been in churches where, so far as one could judge, hardly a soul present was attending to a syllable of the prayer the minister was putting up. The persons present were lounging about in all kinds of listless attitudes: staring at their neighbours, and looking out of the windows; and always ready to turn round to discover what was the cause of any accidental noise. And I have been in churches, too, where (so far as one could judge) not one soul present followed the sermon from its beginning to its end. They sat gaping stupidly about them: yawning very much, and looking at their watches very often: but I could not trace the least appearance of an intelligent perception of the preacher's meaning; nor the faintest vestige of interest in what he said. I have been in churches where a number of people seemed to listen to bits of the sermon here and there: and where there was a great stillness when something was said a little out of the usual way; or if the preacher's manner and mode of expressing himself was very odd, or very violent. I have seen all that. And I desire to know why all this should be so. I want to know why people, who always listen to what is said to them in other places, do not listen to what is said to them in church.

I need hardly say, that in all this, I am not speaking from any feeling of selfish mortification. I *have* preached in churches where nobody seemed to listen

to a word I said: but I can say sincerely (and it is a great reason for thankfulness to God), that I never witnessed anywhere a more attentive congregation than that to which I minister here. But it is possible that even here, there may be some who fail to realise how solemn a duty it is while in God's house, to join heartily in the prayers, and listen heedfully to the exhortation: Perhaps all of us sometimes fail to realise *that:* and there may be those among us who do not sufficiently feel our individual responsibility in this matter; and who do not attend unless when something is said which keeps up our attention without any effort of our own. There are probably many in every congregation who do not make an honest effort to attend. They have no objection to do so, if the preacher makes them do it: but as for resolving earnestly that they *will* listen to the instructions addressed to them in God's house because it is their duty to listen to them,—I fear there is a great lack of that in the case of many professing Christians. Now, why should this be so?

I am quite ready to admit that, to a great degree, it is the preacher's fault when the congregation is not attentive. *He* ought to try to interest them, so as to induce them all to attend. And I doubt not, that every faithful minister tries, according to the talent given him, to do so. I doubt not, that every faithful minister holds it in view in preparing his sermons to make them such that people *can* listen to them:

for of course a sermon might be written in such a dull and wearisome style that nobody *could* listen to it: and I believe that a preacher who holds this end in view will succeed in keeping up the attention of his congregation; most of them, at least; on most Sundays. But still, he will in some places be vexed to find that there are those in church whom he cannot get to attend; and that there are some Sundays when a great many people fail to listen attentively. And I cannot but think, when I find good Christian people in every congregation quite interested and edified by religious counsel which sets others yawning and sleeping,—I cannot but think that it must in some degree be the fault of those inattentive people themselves, that they are so inattentive. And it may, by God's blessing, be profitable to all of us, to consider our duty and responsibility in the matter of the way in which we give heed to the exhortations which form so great and important a part of all worthy Christian worship; and so specially important a part of the worship of our own Church. Let me suggest to you certain practical counsels, suggested by that admonition of our Saviour which forms my text; and which bids us "Take heed how we hear."

1. Let us remember then, for one thing, when we go to God's house, that it is a difficult thing to listen heartily to the faithful preaching of the Gospel: and for this reason among many other reasons: that the great Adversary of souls, who has such mysterious

access to our hearts, does not want us to listen to it. He does not care about our listening to a lecture on the British Essayists, or on continental travel. *That* does not concern *him.* You may grow as learned and accomplished as you please in merely secular matters; and yet remain all the while under his power as much as ever. But he knows that if we listen earnestly to the faithful preaching of Christ crucified, it may take us away from under his power. It may lead us to repent of our sins: to turn from Satan to God. Now the Enemy does not want to lose any soul from his rule. He would keep us all as by nature we were, under his dominion. And therefore, we may well believe, he tries hard to distract our attention. Now my friends, let us remember all this, as a sober fact. Let us not be willing to fancy it is just the dulness of the sermon, when we find our attention beginning to flag, and our mind beginning to run away upon worldly thoughts. It is by means like these that Satan strives to work us harm. Let us remember this: that every time we sit down in God's house, the Adversary is near us: He (for what we know) sits down beside us; and tries to prevent our listening with profit. Every time the text is given out, just think that for the next thirty minutes, the Enemy will try harder to turn our thoughts away from spiritual things, than he does in all the rest of the week. And the more simple truth there is preached, the more anxious he will be

to keep us from giving due heed to it. You must lay your account with having something to resist, if you want to listen thoroughly and throughout to a gospel discourse. You will not have a fair field. You will have wind and tide against you. You will not have the same chance and opportunity of being attentive, that you would have had if you were reading the newspaper, or listening to a discourse which was not about religion. The Adversary will do all he can to make your thoughts wander away elsewhere: and you must, by God's grace, resist him, that he may flee from you. You must not count on his going of himself.

2. Let us remember, next, that we do not go to church to be amused, but to be instructed and edified. And you have learned to little purpose from your experience of life, if you have not learned that in this world instruction is rarely a pleasing thing. To get instruction is almost always hard work. All learning implies an effort: God has made the universe in such a fashion that this must be so. I do not suppose there is almost anything which we come to learn earlier in life than this. By the time a boy is six or seven years old, he has come quite to understand, that by some curious arrangement it is so ordered, that to do anything good, and profitable, it is needful to make a push and an effort; whereas to do what is idle and useless takes no effort at all. A schoolboy must *work*, to learn his lessons: but it needs no effort,

and no labour, to play at ball or marbles. It needs no self-denial to do that. In short, in this world, to get instruction needs an effort: to take amusement is almost the only thing we can do, that needs no effort. Now, as I said, we go to God's house to be instructed,—not to be amused: and therefore we are to remember that we must try, and try hard, to profit by the instructions we get there. We are not to expect that we shall learn by them if we do not take pains to do so. Just make up your mind to this: that religious instruction *cannot* be made so interesting, —cannot be made so as to be listened to without an effort,—in the same way as some amusing or romantic story, or some lively disquisition upon worldly matters. It is right and proper for the preacher to do all he can to make his sermons interesting: to make them such that they will keep up people's attention whether they are trying to attend or not: but in the nature of things, there is a limit to what he *can do.* In the nature of things, it is impossible to make serious instruction as attractive as light amusement. It just cannot be done: and do not expect it. It is impossible to make a sermon as interesting as some highly-wrought romance. Many of you, doubtless, have known what it is to sit up, hour after hour, late into the night, to read perhaps some life-like fiction, in which you had got intensely interested: You were under the spell of an enchanter: you could not close the magic pages till you had learned how the plot

unravelled itself at last. But I suppose very few of us would like to listen for as long a time to the very best preacher, discoursing of the very grandest truths. I have little doubt that if any preacher now-a-days were to do as we are told St Paul did once,—continue his sermon till midnight,—a very large proportion of his hearers would be in the case of Eutychus. An hour is not long, given to the newspapers: but a sermon of an hour is very long. Let me conclude what has been suggested on this head, by saying to you: When you hear the text of the sermon given out, do not expect something so striking, or eloquent, or odd, that you will be able to listen to it throughout without an effort. Lay your account with having to *try* to attend to it; and then probably you will.

3. Let us remember (thirdly), that we ought to *prepare* before going to church. Let us not expect the minister who is to conduct God's worship to do everything. He casts the seed: but the soil on which the seed is scattered, is in our own hearts: and we must try to get that soil ready to receive the seed. You know quite well that if you took the very best grain in the world, and scattered it on the grassy surface of a field, without first breaking up the soil with plough and harrow, and making it ready to do the seed justice; you would have but a poor crop when the harvest-days come round. And even so, the truths of the gospel will have very little effect,—in ordinary cases perhaps no effect at all,—when cast on a hard

heart, unbroken and unsoftened by previous preparation. There is a great difference between a person who comes to church on Sunday morning with his heart hard from the world, and full of worldly cares, and running on his business or his pleasure all the time of service:—there is all the difference in the world between a person who comes to church in that way;—and another who comes from his secret devotions, from his reading of the Bible,—from his solemn meditation on its truths,—from his earnest prayer that God would bless the worship of His house. Now, how differently will these two engage in the worship of our Lord! The one comes with his soul ready warmed (as it were) to offer sacrifice: the fire is already burning on the altar. The other comes with his soul cold and hard; and instead of beginning at once to worship, he needs first to try and begin to get ready to do so. What wonder, then, if the very same words which seem weary and heartless to the unprepared worshipper, should be full of interest and life to the prepared one? I wish heartily, my friends, that we were all more earnestly set to prepare before coming to God's house! It is curious, that with the needfulness of preparation so plain and so pressing, it should be so much neglected. Really the thing is too plain. You know it would never do to bring out a locomotive engine, without any fire in its furnace, and without any steam in its boiler; and fasten it to a train, and expect it to draw it away.

No: the engine can draw the train when it has been prepared to do so: it cannot when it has not. And in like manner, unless a man gets up the fire, as it were, in his heart, before going to God's house, he cannot start off at once, so to speak, in God's worship. Would that we could always be sure, when we take our accustomed places here on the morning of each Lord's-day, that hundreds of earnest prayers have gone up that morning already, for a blessing on our worship: and that when we blend our supplications in one, and send them up in the sanctuary with a single voice, we are only continuing a pleasant work of communion with our God and Saviour, begun already in our own chambers and by our own fire-sides!

4. Fourthly, while we take heed how we hear, let me suggest, as one thing implied in that, Let us not hear in a critical spirit. I do not mean by this that we are to take all the preacher says upon trust, as though it must be certainly true because he says it. No: try it by the standard of God's Word: and believe what you hear from the pulpit only in so far as it has its warrant there. But what I mean is this: That we should beware of accustoming ourselves to sit in church during sermon, just thinking of the literary characteristics of the sermon. That is not the frame of mind in which we are likely to receive a good and saving impression from the truths we hear. Indeed, it is hard to think of any attitude of a soul

human being can assume in God's house, that makes it more improbable,—it might almost be said impossible,—that he should be instructed, corrected, and edified,—than when he takes the position of a reviewer, so to speak: of one charged to form an estimate of the logic, taste, correctness of the discourse. Let me therefore say, Avoid getting into the way of walking home from church, saying, "Not such a good sermon that as usual:" "Rather tame or rather animated in manner to-day;"—and the like. If we accustom our children to hear that kind of thing Sunday after Sunday, we make it very unlikely that they will profit by what they hear in God's house. And by getting into this way of hearing, the hearer is fencing round his own heart as with a flinty armour, through which hardly any arrow of conviction can be expected to make its way.

I do not counsel anything that is impossible. And it is impossible, for a mind of any activity, to help forming some kind of estimate of the wisdom and fitness of anything addressed to it, in church as elsewhere. It can only be when the wisdom and fitness of the counsel addressed to us are recognised and felt, that we can take it home and act upon it. There are such things as sermons which are inexpressibly bad; and you cannot force yourself to think such good: you cannot hinder yourself from seeing how bad they are. But it is no one's duty to attend habitually on ministrations which he feels do him

nothing but harm. It is every one's duty to withdraw from such ministrations. Yet when we have found the preacher whose views of truth and cast of mind suit us, you know quite well what I mean when I suggest the duty of hearing in a teachable spirit, not in a captious. There are weaknesses and faults enough in the very best sermons we are ever likely to hear: yet surely, if we consider in a right frame what is said, there are few from which we may not derive some profit. Let our desire be, that we hear God's word with reverence and attention, and receive it with meekness and gladness of heart.

And finally, let us remember, that the great thing about which we are to hear in God's house, can be nothing other than the familiar story of Christ and salvation through Him. Anything entirely new, at this stage in the history of the Church and of the experience of Christian people, is quite sure to be false. "We preach Christ crucified:" and though there is not a matter bearing on a human being's welfare in time or eternity that may not fitly be spoken of from the pulpit; and though there is hardly a subject in history, or science, or letters, that may not occasionally be referred to thence; still the grand theme of worthy Gospel preaching is the Gospel; and all things beside are introduced only by way of illustrating and enforcing *that*. We do not go to church to be electrified by bursts of eloquence; or to be amused by out-of-the-way illustrations; or to be pleased with ingenious

arguments; or to do what some people vaguely talk about as "enjoying an intellectual treat." We go, because we are immortal beings, destined to an eternity of bliss or woe; and because we would be reminded of the way in which we may escape from sin and misery and find happy entrance into heaven. We go, not so much to be told of anything we do not know already, as to receive as it were a fresh impulse in our heavenward way: to hear for the hundredth time those good news which we never can hear too often: to listen to old, old truths, with nothing new save (it may be) the illustration and the way of presenting them: to give heed to doctrines, known from our childhood, of pardon through the Redeemer's blood; of holiness and comfort through the Blessed Spirit's operation; and of an immortality of peace and purity when all these present troubles are past: doctrines all the more welcome because we know them so well. For indeed they are like that music, best loved because longest known; that makes us feel that it is greatly because we have heard it so often, that we love to hear it so much.

Such, then, are some thoughts on that admonition of the Saviour which forms the text; and which, as it was spoken first, does in its spirit touch our duty as hearers of the preached Word of God. I commend these things to your own serious thought. It is the way with many, in these days, to depreciate

the ancient means of grace, so greatly valued by our devout fathers: and the preacher, now, is somewhat disheartened by knowing well that in these realms there is an increasing class of those who almost ostentatiously contemn his vocation, as one whose use is gone by; and who simply put aside his counsels and warnings. Not here, indeed, let us thank God, has that cynical tide reached as yet: and with so many within these walls marked for the holy ministry, and anticipating with solemn expectation the day when they shall ascend the pulpit and set forth to their fellow-sinners the unsearchable riches of Christ, it would be strange, indeed, if it had done so. We believe, as in duty bound, that "The Spirit of God maketh the preaching of the word, an effectual means of convincing and converting sinners, and of building them up in holiness and comfort, through faith, unto salvation." I always shrink, with some measure of horror, from anything like exaggeration in speaking of such a thing: but surely, in the light of such words, truly apprehended, it abides a grave and responsible duty both to preach and to hear. And it is a pleasant thing to think, upon the evening of the Lord's-day; pleasant for every true worshipper that joined in the solemn service, and not least for the minister whose great privilege it was to conduct it;—when he is already perhaps perplexing himself in thinking what his text ought to be for the next Sunday;—it is pleasant for all to think that good has

been done to-day: that Christ's Gospel has been preached to-day: that some good impression may have been made, some thoughtless one startled, some mourner comforted, some believer directed, some burdened and perplexed enabled to cast their care on Him Who cares for us; some who will soon be dead, pointed anew to Him in Whom believing they shall never die. But then it is humbling, too, to think what evil has mingled with the services of God's house: what alloy there was in the worship of the best; how many did not worship at all. Yes, true it is, we offend in many things, and we come short in all things. And taking one's last look round the church before leaving it on a Sunday afternoon,—after the space within its walls, a little since filled with the multitude of seeming worshippers, is left again to its six-days' loneliness,—who can fail sometimes to think that perhaps, this day, there has been here as much provocation of God's forbearance, as true worship rendered to His holy name! And looking back over the centuries through which God's worship has been conducted on this spot where we are now assembled, what a sum of guilt has doubtless been here incurred, through unheeded exhortations and indevout prayers! I do not say, or think, that our best prayers or efforts will in time to come save us entirely from like shortcoming: but surely it is worth while to earnestly ask God's Holy Spirit, without Whom we can do nothing as we ought, to enable

us, when in His house, to pray more earnestly and hear more profitably than we have commonly done as yet. And, thinking of this, let me ask you to consider whether it would not be a fit thing, if on entering God's house, we should each reverently pause for a silent moment and ask the Blessed Spirit if He would be with us in the service to which we are to give ourselves: and whether it would not be a fit thing too, if when the blessing is spoken, we should pause for a silent moment more, to pray for the improvement of what we have heard, and forgiveness that we have not heard more attentively and worshipped more worthily. Surely these prayers would not go for nothing: we should each be aware of some help.

And now unto the God of all grace, Who hath called us unto His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, be glory and dominion for ever and ever. Amen.

XI.

NO NIGHT IN HEAVEN.

"For there shall be no night there."—REV. xxi. 25.

IT will be a great change, no doubt, to each of us, when we go to the other world. Many things, there, must be strange: everything may be so. When we are young, and enthusiastic, we do not take this in so distinctly. But as we go on in life, and get very much accustomed to this world; and grow very strongly if not very warmly attached to the old surroundings, and the old ways of doing and feeling; I think this must sometimes be borne in upon us with a startling plainness. Now do you ever, when you are lying awake on your bed in the dark night, try to think how many things you must go away from when you die: old familiar things which you have grown accustomed to for many years, and which you can hardly see how you are to do without? There is post-time, and your letters: there are the newspapers: there is the fireside: there is your special chair in which you sit in the evening: there is your

home, the centre to you of all the interests of all the world: there are the familiar faces there; the little ways and habitudes, which are each like a tendril that has struck root. All these must go out with this life. It is far better, indeed, to depart and be with Christ: but we have little, very little idea of the kind of thing. We think we can understand what Rest means: because we have very often, when wearied, known what it is to sink into that grateful quiet. And no doubt at all, the rest which remains for the people of God will be as thoroughly suited to the soul's needs and capacities, as the rest experienced here to those of wearied body and mind. But, passing within the Veil, we must go in simple faith: trusting ourselves entirely to that Blessed Redeemer Who knoweth our frame, and hath gone to prepare a place for us.

We need not pretend anything other, than that we all have often thought how great a comfort and blessing it would be, if we could get some clearer information about the unseen world. We should be thankful to know as much about the country beyond the grave, as we know of the country beyond the Atlantic. It is not merely that in a little we are going there ourselves: it is that some of those who were and are dearest to us are there already. And we would give a great deal to know what they are doing and thinking about, just to-day: what they were doing and thinking about this morning when we awoke. But, whenever we are sure that it is God's will that any-

thing should be, then we are sure that *that* is right. Even if we could not make out the slightest reason for it, we have so entire confidence in the kindness and the wisdom of our Saviour, that we could yet say, from the bottom of our heart, 'Thy will be done! And if there is anything as to which it is plain what is God's will, it is that you and I should go on through this life, in very great ignorance as to all details concerning the other. Solemnly reticent is Revelation upon this point: herein differing utterly from all false revelations. Yet, if there were a chapter in the New Testament that gave us some particulars about the state of happy souls: that told us the kind of homes they live in,—how they parcel out their time,—what they think about,—how they acquire knowledge,—what they look like,—how that chapter would be read and re-read! And even when the New Testament begins to tell us about the place we call Heaven, you must all have observed, a hundred times, the singular way in which it tells us. It tells us what Heaven IS NOT. It tells us what will *not* be there. "There shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying; neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away:" such is the strain. We are told of things that used to be here; which shall be gone. Perhaps it would be impossible, by any words which we could understand, to make clear to us the mode of being: but we are able to understand that things which used to pain and vex in this world,

will be absent from that. And here, in my text, is one more of these pieces of negative description. "There shall be no night there." Now that statement, which there seems no reason to doubt that we are intended to understand literally, implies the most essential and striking differences between the life above and the life here. It tells us a great deal of vital change that must pass upon the redeemed soul in the moment of entering into glory: Not indeed of change in its spiritual character and identity: As concerns *that*, he that is unjust shall be unjust still and he that is holy holy still: But we, my friends, accustomed gladly to welcome the coming of night, with its kindly sleep, and its opportunity of breaking off and beginning anew in the work of life, must be very different people before we could be in any way fitted to live in a world, concerning which infallible authority tells us that "there shall be no night there."

Let us give the remainder of our meditation at this time to the following out into some of its meanings and results, of the assurance contained in the text. And may the Blessed Spirit, Who alone can make us meet for "the inheritance of the saints in light," enable us rightly to regard it.

It is of course a very primary and obvious reflection upon the text,—just the one which would come readiest to the mind of a child,—that the inspired

words tell us that in the better world there are no seasons of darkness. The place of woe is "the outer darkness:" the place of rest is the land of light, where the sun shall no more go down. Now there is something in darkness that is naturally fearful to human beings. You see this plainly in children, in whom the instinctive feeling has not yet been educated away. And as darkness has in it something terrible, not to man only but to the entire animated creation, so light, its opposite, has in it something in which all sentient beings rejoice. You know how as the day fades into the evening twilight, a certain thoughtful sadness spreads itself over the whole face of nature. All sounds in which natural voices speak, take a something of melancholy. The flow of the river falls sadly on the ear: the sigh of the wind is changed into a moan. And as the growing shadows take the landscape from our sight, we cannot but feel, especially if we are alone, that there is something mournful in this gloom over earth and sky. Apart entirely from all sentimentalism, by the make of our being, we feel that darkness is a dreary thing.

But who has not felt the change from the sadness of his farewell, when the rising sun casts his joyful beams on the world! It must be a very care-worn heart, or a very hardened one, that is not aware of some gush of gladness at first wandering forth over the dewy grass of the crisp Autumn morning, when the level sun is touching the yellow sheaves, and all

nature looks peaceful and thankful. And when you think that this scene, so gay with its green and golden earth below and its blue sky above, is the very same which a few hours since was one great blank, one unsightly mass of gloom, and that the coming of the light made all the difference, surely you are aware how just are the words of Solomon, that "truly the light is sweet, and a pleasant thing it is for the eyes to behold the sun."

Doubtless, then, it is a cheerful thought that in the happy world, there will be no darkness: none of the alarms, the dangers, the stumbling steps, which come of darkness: none of that sorrow, that sense of failure, that sinking of heart, which in this world often make us thankful for the friendly gloom and shade. Yet the light will be such as never yet was on sea or land: such as never fell from sun or star. It will not be level light of the autumn sunset that shall turn that new Jerusalem to a Golden City! We do not pretend to explain the truth by which we hold: but over and over again we are informed that the never-failing light comes of the Beatific Vision. "And the city had no need of the sun, neither of the moon, to shine in it: for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof." True it is, literally true, "He hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light."

My friends, we must needs be so changed from what we are, before we shall be able rightly to appre-

ciate the blessing of a never-ceasing day, that, being what we are, we can hardly without some sense of weariness even think of it. The day is commonly long enough for us, and the night does not come too soon: Although light be the pleasanter thing, darkness is in truth just as needful for us as day. But we look farther than the mere material, obvious fact, when we look at the assurance, that there is no night in heaven. I cannot think that one of all those many who have read that text and been cheered by it, ever stopped upon the mere first thought: ever failed to go on to think of other darkness than that which falls upon the eyes. Many of you will think of the lines of that good man Philip Doddridge, which expand and linger on what my text says: Two of them are, "Nor shall one moment's darkness mix With that unvaried day." Few, probably, ever read them without the ready reflection: "No dark moments in heaven: ah, there are many here!" For it is one of those universally-felt analogies that grow into universal language, which set forth darkness as the type of error, of sorrow, of sin.

"The people which sat in darkness saw great light:" no one ever failed to understand the imagery. Light is the natural emblem of knowledge and truth: darkness of ignorance and error. When we speak of the dark ages of the world's history, every one understands that it is mental and spiritual darkness we are thinking of: The sun shone then just as he does

now; nor did men walk about, groping. When we speak of the dark places of the earth, we think of regions far more favoured in the respect of material light than we are: All the sunshine of the tropics cannot make those countries anything but darkened ones, where the people never heard of Christ or salvation through Him. Now it is plainly told us, that the gloom which settles down upon the spirit,—the gloom of ignorance, the gloom of error, will be gone, above. "Now we see through a glass darkly, but then face to face: Now we know in part, but then shall we know even as also we are known." In the better world, we may not know everything: but all we know we shall know right. An infinitude of erroneous beliefs, of ingrained prejudices that distort the truth, will be swept away. My friends, thinking how in heaven all wrong beliefs will be gone, let us not go away to heathen darkness, or to races given to stock-and-stone idolatry: let us look no farther than our fellow-Christians; and think how great a change there will be when we shall all see eye to eye. It is indeed very disheartening, very perplexing, to remark the irreconcilable differences of belief among good men. And it will not do to say that these conflicting beliefs are about things of no consequence. In many cases, they are about things of very great consequence. No man of intelligence will say that there is not a very vital difference between those who hold the Evangelical theory as to the way of salvation and those who

hold the Sacramental; or that there is not a very vital difference between the sacerdotal and the non-sacerdotal theory of the Christian Ministry or Priesthood; or that there is not a serious difference between those who hold what is called the voluntary principle in ecclesiastical organisation, and those who believe (as we believe) that to act on that principle would be the degradation of the clergy and the secularisation of the State. Now, these are not merely very important and weighty matters; but they are matters in regard to which truth cannot be on both sides of the question. If the Evangelical theory of the way of salvation is right, then the Sacramental theory is wrong. It is not here as it is with such questions as that between Episcopacy and Presbytery; where you may say that God's Word sets up the one exclusively no more than it sets up the other,—and that it just depends on national tastes and likings which of the two is the right thing for that particular nation: so that you may hold Episcopacy to be the right National Church for England and Presbytery to be the right National Church for Scotland. Nor are these questions which divide Christians into sects, openly hostile or quietly suspicious, like that between a gorgeous Ritual and a bare and shabby one,—where a broader view would show both sides right and both wrong;—each side right in holding by what suits it best, each side wrong in trying to thrust what suits it best on the other side which it does not suit at all.

There is no concealing it, professing Christians are divided upon questions on one side of which the truth must be. Truth cannot be on both sides of a question to which the answer must be an unqualified Yes or No. And oh how it wearies the earnest spirit, to find good and wise men saying Yes to the question to which he is sure the true answer is No! Pilate's dreary *What is truth* suggests itself so readily: and perhaps the temptation of this present day to many is, to train one's self to what looks like a tolerant and liberal spirit, but what is really an indifferent and cynical spirit, that does not care: that looks on with composure at the conflict of diverse opinions, because it minds very little about any, and believes very firmly in none. I do not say, my friends, that a man's salvation depends on which side he takes in the theological discussions of this perplexing day. I find no warrant whatsoever in God's Word (and I bow to no other authority) for saying of any metaphysical theory of Christian doctrine, no matter how sound, that "This is the Catholic faith: which except a man believe faithfully, he cannot be saved:" I venture not to say that error upon such topics as those suggested will keep any soul out of Heaven: but I do say that such as by Christ's blood enter the world where darkness is unknown, will know which answer to every question is right; and that no dissension, no angry controversy, no irreconcilable strife of belief, will rend asunder the glorious Church there! Perhaps there, for the very

first time since earlier and better days, the Good Shepherd will see all His Flock gathered in one Fold. For the mists of prejudice, the clouds of error, the distortions of bigotry and self-conceit, will be dispelled for ever by the light of God. Here, indeed, "the people sat in darkness:" but as for the better country, "There shall be no night there!"

There is another darkness than that of error: Darkness is the world-wide type of woe. The night of weeping is the darkest night of all: and there is no outward shadow so gloomy, as those in the valley of the shadow of death. It may have been in the bright summer-days that the first break was made in our domestic circle; and the first vacant chair left by the fireside of our home: It may be that the fresh green sod was broken, and the early daisies turned down, to make a sister's or a parent's grave: It may be that we bore them to their last resting-place, when the primroses were springing in the woods, and the trees wore their first hopeful green: but it was a dark time for all that,—the darkest we ever knew. Of course, it is the sunshine within the breast that can do most to brighten; and nothing darkens like the shadow there. And no doubt, there are dark times in our life, which we feel more selfishly: times of bodily suffering, weary and heavy: times of bitter disappointment, when our hopes and plans fail, and it is all blank and desolate: times of mortifying defeat;

of things in our own lot and the lot of others to which we find it very hard to make up our mind: times of that inexplicable depression and despondency in which everything seems changed,—seems heartless, weary and unprofitable: times of despondency too easily explained, through the mournful sense of sinfulness, of growing worldliness of spirit, of coldness and indevotion of heart, of lack of interest in God's worship, of general backsliding and falling away from grace. But whatever may be unknown to us concerning the better world, this is plainly revealed to us, that there sorrow is unknown. "And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow, nor crying, neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away." Sorrow must be where there is sin: every fallen heart must have a share in it: but with sin, sorrow will depart. Sorrow will have done its work; many times a blessed and beneficent work: *There* it will not be needed; and therefore it will go. And surely, my friends, in this world of trouble, there is something very cheering, in the thought that there is a Place, open for the entrance of us all, where there is no worry, no anxiety, no parting, no blighted hopes, no heavy hearts. You bear up under the growing weariness here, for the thought of rest there. And when the care-worn lines are smoothed out of the dead face of some one dear, now asleep in Christ, who you know was pressed with many anxieties and cares

through an anxious life; remember, thankfully, that all the burden that lay so heavy, is fairly passed away! And thinking of this one thing: and knowing how sorely perplexed that heart often used to be, and how anxious that face; surely you will say, amid your own loss, "To depart and be with Christ is far better." Far better, indeed, for a hundred reasons: but meanwhile we cling to the humble one that we can understand, that there is no night of sorrow there!

These are obvious thoughts. There is no night above: and the assurance implies that in that land of light there is no darkness, either around the soul or within it. But though the thought of darkness be that which comes most readily when we think of night, there are others. The sun arises, as the Psalmist says: and "man goeth forth unto his work, and to his labour, until the evening. But with the evening, in all ordinary cases, the task is intermitted: and night is the season of natural rest and sleep.

It has already been suggested, that to beings such as we are now, bodily and spiritually, it would be no blessing at all to be carried to a place where there is no night. We can work for a while: we can enjoy or endure for a while: but then we grow weary. We need breaks in the onward way: leavings off and beginnings again. The body, muscles, limbs, brain, hands, grow jaded and exhausted: so does the mind: and we must seek refreshment and restoration in the

unconsciousness of sleep. Sufficient for the day, in most cases, is the work of it; and the night, with its grateful rest, comes as a most welcome blessing. "Surely He giveth His beloved sleep:" and than healthful, unbroken, dreamless, restoring sleep, in this life even He can hardly give anything better. Oh the blessed relief of unconsciousness; in which you get away from all your cares! And you know how wisely and kindly the Creator has fitted this world for our habitation, and us for the world we inhabit, in respect of the alternation of day and night, never failing to come once in the twenty-four hours, which make just the time in which we need a season of rest. There are worlds whose day and night are many times as long as ours: we could not sleep through their nights and keep awake through their days. We have plainly been made to live on a world that turns round in four-and-twenty hours. It suits our make, in body and mind; and we suit it: Rather, are suited by a kind God.

So you see that the text, telling us there is no night in heaven, tells us a great deal about the people who live in heaven. They are people who can do without sleep. They are people who never grow tired. You remember how the unnamed man, who wrote that beautiful hundred and twenty-first psalm, says of God Himself, that He "neither slumbers nor sleeps." Now, how great a change must pass upon you and me, before we, always so thankful for reviving sleep,

and well aware that sleeplessness is one of the most depressing and wearing of bodily troubles, can be fitted to be happy in the world where there is no night at all! And it is because we, with our present ideas, our present ways of thinking and feeling, look on to the world above,—and involuntarily think to ourselves how we, being what we are, should like it,—that one often meets with the expression of a thought like that of the great American genius who said when he was dying, that he did not want to go straight to heaven at once: that he was fairly worn out, and wanted rest; that after all the labours and troubles of this world, what he longed for was an unbroken slumber of a thousand years; and then to awaken, fresh and buoyant, to go into the presence of Christ. Oh, the utter delusion! It comes of carrying ideas, got from this life, to one where they have no application: it comes of the poor creature, that needs the hours of helpless sleep in each four-and-twenty, and feels weariness growing on heart and head after all,—forgetting how different he will be, the glorified soul, and the spiritual body, how strong, how light, how joyful, how unwearied, in the Holiest Land, in the Better Jerusalem! And There, "the weary are at rest:" those who were weary here. It is not the years of slumber, that are needed to revivify the flagging spirit: it is the presence of the Saviour, the vision of the King in His beauty, that will make the soul feel WELL at last. He "will give

you rest," according to His never-failing promise: and never did worn-out man know such a time of refreshing in this world, as from the first sight of that kindest Face, which we are sure to know!

Even we can understand that weariness is an imperfection. Sleep is the kindly helper, that enables us to get through our duty notwithstanding that imperfection: but it is a far better thing never to be weary at all. No doubt, *that* will be something very far out of the range of former experience: something very strange and new. Think, brethren: To have always the fresh feeling of the morning: the brisk elation of the most bracing morning of the early Autumn: Never to desire to stop in any occupation; but to have the interest in it always fresh; and the strength for it. We have often wished here that things would keep their first racy enjoyableness; but with use it must needs go away. You all know how the delightful feeling of the seaside air, the salt health-laden breeze, that is so keenly sensible by a newcomer, goes away after the first day or two. You all know how the wonderful green of sweet country scenes goes off when you live always among them: and, going on through life, the flavour grows faint of many things we once cared for greatly,—studies, work, recreations, which we have come to care little for now. And we can all understand, that that disappointed sense of pleasant illusion lost, will be unknown in heaven. No flagging interest there: no

feeling the praises and the service and the Beatific Vision grow dull because we have had enough of them: the lively relish, the vital spring within, always fresh and strong. We, as we are, can hardly understand this; understand what it really means. But it is all told us concerning the Golden City, of which the beloved Apostle certifies us, that "there shall be no night there!"

We have rested, for a little, in the contemplation of the Better Country, into which we humbly hope to find entrance at the last; being washed in the Redeemer's precious blood, and sanctified by the Blessed Holy Spirit. We have tried to do this, soberly: avoiding all extravagance; and any prying into things not revealed. The child that died yesterday knows far more of that life, than the wisest and best Christian in this world. And yet, familiar as this world looks and strange as that looks, let us remember, that it is here we are strangers and pilgrims; and that *there* is our Home!

XII.

DEATH IN TRESPASSES AND SINS.

"And you hath He quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins."—EPH. ii. 1.

IT is a commonplace now; everybody knows it: but I remember how startled I was when I was first told it by a man of science, that everywhere, in the length and breadth of the world, we are encompassed with that which once was living, and which is now dead. The dust we tread on may once have pulsed with life: the grass that springs around us grows from a soil that is lavishly mingled with particles which once formed portion of a human being. We little think of this, as we tread the familiar ways that surround our home. It is natural enough, indeed, when we walk the paths of some ancient burying-place, that it should be with some thought of the quiet generations that people it, that we step over its grassy graves. How many stout hearts, we may think, are mouldering here! How many strong arms are weak enough: how many bounding pulses are still: how many cherished purposes are forgotten!

Life was once to them the same warm, engrossing thing it is now to you. They felt the whirl of its excitement: They knew the gush of its affections: they delighted in its bright hopes: Now these are all over, and they are here. But it strikes as something more remarkable when science tells us that we may go anywhere,—may trace the world from end to end; and at every separate place yet feel that we are in company with the generations of former men. Go to the last-found region of the earth, where the foot of living man has hardly ever trodden the rich herbage, and the eye of living man hardly ever looked upon the glowing leaves and the gorgeous sky: and even there, if philosophy be right, wafting winds and flooding rains have borne their strange, unthought-of charge before you: even in that young fresh world, the dead are there!

All the untold millions that have lived and died on this world since the birth of time: all the great army of human beings who have lived their little hour, and enjoyed and endured, till the dust returned to the earth as it was, and the spirit to God who gave it: all the endless crowds who have left to the reckless keeping of the elements that mortal part of them which was all that mortals knew;—where are they? For their souls, we know not; though it must be a realm of vast population: "the majority," as the ancient Roman called it, of the Race. As for their bodies, you tread on their changed and faded relics

as you walk the street. There is something of them present in the yellow autumn harvests,—in the leafy summer trees. You breathe an atmosphere to which departed human life has given its unseen share.

And so the dead are not near us only when we pass the sequestered burying-place, where fresh monuments and newly-turned turf remind you of them: not only in spots more secluded still, lonely hillsides where they have slept for ages, as we may judge from the gray stones and the level sod: not only there, but also in the city's streets, where art has quite supplanted nature,—where the stones you walk on came from far away, and piled-up buildings form and close the vista, where the hum of passers-by and the whirl of business stun the ear:—even there, amid all that bustling life, there is a still impassive company, present but not spectators, amid the noise but hearing nothing, on the spot and among the men, yet parted from all besides itself by a gulf broader and deeper than the Atlantic. It is not a fancy, but a scientific fact, that a thousand pulses may once have beat in that dust which our footsteps stir, and the wind wafts in play: and in *that* we see man's ruins, as well as man's original.

But I have not selected this text, my brethren,—it would be very idle if I had,—merely to speak to you of the universal presence of the materially dead, and of the thoughtlessness of the materially living as to one silent class of their constant companions. There

is another kind of death compared with which the separation of the soul and body is a thing of little account: and there are many of the dead in this sad sense mixed up with all companies of men, while those around have but little thought that the dead are present. You would be startled, if when you looked round this church, upon this congregation, you saw here and there a stark figure, whose pallid cheek and sunken eye told you that the soul had gone from it. Well, what will you say when you are told that perhaps the dead in a sterner reality, *are* here? Is it not something serious to remember that amid this assembly there may be the spiritually-dead, although you cannot see that this man and that man, —the person sitting next you perhaps,—is a lifeless man, in the sight and in the language of God. God says that the soul is dead, when it is separated from Him. The soul is dead, when it is sunk in trespasses and sins: The soul is dead, in short, in every man who is not a true Christian,—not a converted and regenerated man. And it matters nothing that when the soul is dead, you may see no sign of death on the body's face. It matters nothing that the soul though dead, can take notice of what is passing around it, and hold converse, and transact business, and put forth energy, and perhaps win the world's applause by all the glitter of fancy, and all the pith of intellect. All these things leave it still in God's view, dead: and perhaps to the view of angels, they

only make the contrast sadder between the vitality and vivacity in an earthly sense, and the torpor and senselessness in a spiritual. But the effect of this thing,—this circumstance that the body lives on though the soul is dead, and that even the soul though dead still retains its natural energies,—makes it impossible to know at a glance who are the truly living, and who are the truly dead. You look round on the congregation in the house of God: perhaps there are dead souls there. You see the ranks of devout-looking people coming to the communion-table: ah! no human power can fence that table against hypocrisy and self-delusion: perhaps there are dead souls there. You walk the streets of a great city: you hardly think that amid that constant succession of hurrying anxious passers-by, there are some of whom God would say, that they "have no life in them." You engage in the business and bustle of the world: you hear many men speak, and see many men act: and you can hardly think that the most bustling and energetic of those you meet with,—the keenest observers, the most pushing business-men,—may be people who in the language of inspiration,—have no life at all!

You cannot long read the Bible, without coming to understand that the Gospel is all conversant with a certain life,—spiritual life,—which men by nature want, and which it professes to impart. So much is

this so, that St Paul speaking of the Gospel, calls it "the word of life." And all men are by nature, dead. Now *dead* is a startling word. Yet startling as it may be, there is no doubt that it is God's word to express the state of an unconverted man. You see in the words of the text how St Paul describes the condition of the Ephesian converts while yet in a state of nature: "And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins." You remember the message in the Revelation to the Church at Sardis: "I know thy works, that thou hast a name that thou livest, and art dead." You remember St Paul's words to the Colossians: "You being dead in your sins, hath He quickened." You remember how Christ describes the great change at conversion: "He that heareth my word, and believeth on Him that sent me, is passed from death to life." And the apostle John, in his first Epistle, says without a word of explanation, just as if it were the idea and the phrase current among Christians to signify conversion, "We know that we have passed from death to life." Now I can quite imagine that there may be some idea in your minds that when life and death are spoken of in this way, they are just strong expressions, putting in an extreme, figurative way, the very highest degrees of good and ill as regards the soul: spiritual and eternal life just meaning everything that is most good; spiritual death everything that is most evil. But though this may be true to a certain extent, we

believe that there is a more specific meaning in the mention of death in the text. The apostle, we think, meant more than just to give a very strong, and almost an exaggerated description of the wretchedness of the Ephesians before their conversion. I wish to show you that there are such characteristics about the soul while in a state of nature, that its unconverted, unrenewed, unsaved condition, may very justly be described as by emphasis, a state of death.

1. When we look at death, as contradistinguished from life, the first thing which strikes us as characteristic of it, is, that death is a state of insensibility to all outward things. The dead body is senseless. You know that when the soul is gone, and the body lies waiting the day of burial, cold and motionless, its outward senses inform the inner part that knows and feels, no more. You know that no voice, however kindly or however awful, can find its way to the dull, cold ear of death. "Night is the time to die," says the poet; and how many of our partings by death are associated with those midnight hours when all the world is still: but when the morning came dimly through the windows at last, though the light fell upon the pale face, it wakened no vision in the sightless eye. The dear sister we laid on her clay-cold pillow amid the fresh leaves and flowery promise of May, felt no gladness communicated by a smiling

world: and the friend we bore to his grave through cutting winds, and covered with icy clods, was not vexed or saddened by the gloomy winter sky. The country grave, so sweet and pleasant for the survivor to revisit,—over whose soft turf the daisies grow, and round whose mossy headstone the wild bee hums,—is no pleasanter to our departed brother than that in the neglected corner, where the weeds and nettles grow rank. And though it seems to us so much a fitter thing, that the Christian dust, "still united to Christ," which sleeps for the Great Awaking, should lie far in the country stillness than where the traffic of the city street roars by: this is a thing felt only by the living visitor; for the dead tenant does not know nor care.

And is there not here a most certain resemblance between natural and spiritual death? Is not the dead soul as senseless to the spiritual realities which are all around it, as the dead body is to all material things? Yes; brethren, the worldly soul is well called dead, because it is in a condition of heedlessness of all spiritual things. In our natural state, we never perceive and never know the great spiritual realities which press on us on every side. They must be spiritually discerned. We are naturally heedless about the salvation of our souls. We are naturally quite unaware of our sinfulness, our guilt, our danger. Naturally we feel no need of Christ, and we see no preciousness in Him. Naturally we see no such very

great evil in sin, though it be the "abominable thing God hates." Naturally we do not feel the world's vanity: naturally we do not realise the truth, that "one thing is needful:" naturally we never hear that constant voice of God in our ears, that calls us to repentance and earnest care of our souls: we never notice that all the dealings of God's providence are intended to compel men to think of eternity,—that by mercies, afflictions, His Word, His ministers, God is entreating us, "Why will ye die;"—that in very deed, it was not in the power even of the Almighty to do more to constrain us into a hearty closing with the gospel-call, unless He had driven us by a mechanical force, and quite set aside our nature as rational responsible beings. By nature we never hear Christ, as He stands at the door and knocks and pleads with us; as He shows us all He did and suffered to open the way to life: we are blind as the stone to the loveliness of the Saviour, and the beauty of the kingdom of heaven. By nature we quite forget that God is always with us and watching us: for oh! if the eyes of our soul were opened to see that one truth, could we ever sin, with God standing by and looking on!—You know, we all of us live in two worlds; a world of matter, and a world of mind. Well, most human beings come into the world with eyes that see material things,—ears that hear them,—fingers that can touch them: but all human beings are born with inner eyes that are blind to spiritual things,—ears

that are deaf to them,—touch that is numb to them: and it is only when the soul "passes from death to life," that it gets spiritual sensation and escapes from spiritual senselessness. And the feeling of those awakened by God's Spirit, is one of startled wonder at their past heedlessness. The feeling of the awakened soul when the reality is seen at length is, How could I ever go on so long, neglecting my salvation and sinning against my God,—amid all *that!*

We do not say that even in the case of those who have felt their need of Christ, spiritual things are always or are ever seen and felt in anything like their real bulk and importance. You cannot help knowing how strange a spell seems over us by nature, keeping us from realising spiritual things as sharply and plainly as we do material. There are these walls: you see them,—you touch them,—you feel they are there: but speak of eternity,—speak of heaven,—speak of endless salvation and perdition,—and though we are told what they mean, still somehow we cannot *feel* their meaning as we ought. They look hazy and unsubstantial: they sound dream-like. Now all this is because of this natural senselessness of death we speak of. Even in those "passed from death to life," except at times which are short and far between, this lethargic opiate influence is not completely gone. Though the spiritual senses are not now altogether torpid, there is still a drowsy numbness about them. The soul still sees and hears spiritual things as in a dream and

through a mist. Oh brethren, all that is needed to our salvation is that we should realise and feel what we already believe. We need to be told no new thing. I do deliberately believe, that it would compel the most reckless man on earth instantly to fly to Jesus, if he just felt for a moment what is meant by eternity, by heaven, by hell. There are such things, I take it for granted you believe: for God's Word says so. If the dead soul could just for one moment waken up to spiritual consciousness: if it could just catch one glimpse of the terrible realities that people its proper world: if, like a lightning-flash, that at black midnight shows you for one moment the landscape round you plainer than ever you saw it by day, God's Spirit would just make the dead soul see where it is;—never again surely would it sink back to the deadly lethargy in which it is resting now. Yes, unconverted man, if you were not senseless as a rock, you would not without a struggle let Satan carry you on, day after day, along the road to ruin: you would not reject the blood and the tearful entreaties of Christ: you would not neglect the multiplied calls and invitations and threatenings of God. You would see the glare of hell on the path of sin you are treading. The grave would whisper to your heart and warn you: the neglected Bible that lies unopened on the dusty shelf, would have a tongue that would break in with urgent remonstrance: your own conscience would smite you with an icy hand when you were on

the point of doing wrong,—would stir you from that carelessness as to spiritual welfare that is content just to sit still and do nothing,—would thunder in your ear that God is by, that death is coming, and judgment after death. And if *that* suffice not, what more can God himself do!

2. When we look at death, as distinguished from life, a second thing which strikes us as characteristic of it, is, that death is a state of helplessness,—a state in which a man can do nothing. I do not know but when any of us first saw death, we were even more struck by its stillness and helplessness, than by its stern disregard of all that is passing near it. Now we say that St Paul was justified in calling the unconverted soul dead, because in a spiritual sense it is helpless,—it can do nothing. It resembles natural death in *that*.

Death is a state, we have said, in which a man can do nothing: and there is no reflection that rises more naturally when we see it, than of the contrast between the former energy and the present helplessness. You may remember how a certain great writer describes the exhumation of the bones of Bruce, after Bannockburn was a story centuries old: how he describes the hand, so nerveless and powerless, which in life had held so firm a grasp, and dealt so heavy a stroke. Scenes may be passing beside the deathbed or above the grave, which you would think should almost stir

the dead man's heart, and bid him rise to the rescue of those in life it beat for: but the patriot rests while his country is enchained, and the parent while his children perish. The soldier guarded faithfully his colours to the last: a child's hand could take them from him now. The dying mother strained her child to her bosom with the last pressure of life: she never moves a finger though heartless strangers take it from her now. The old Egyptian that died two thousand years since pleased himself with the fancy that while the world stood he should rest under the mighty pyramid he reared: but rude hands take him from the sleep of ages, and bear him to far countries across the sea,—he resisting nothing. The awful lines of the greatest poet besought for his bones an untouched resting-place: but long after, when curious eyes looked upon his lowly bed, the dust could utter no reproof of what it did so shrink from, living.

Now if helplessness, if utter incapacity to move a finger to help ourselves, be a symptom of death; then are our souls by nature dead: for in a spiritual sense they can do nothing They can do nothing, that is, towards working out their salvation. By nature, we cannot take a step towards *that*. "Without Me," says Christ, "ye can do nothing:" and our own experience testifies that this is so, in the sense that when left to ourselves, we can make no effectual or successful effort towards salvation. Even when a man is brought to feel something of the necessity of

salvation,—to feel as much of it as mere natural reasonings, apart from God's Spirit, can ever make him feel,—still he finds within himself a strange indisposition to set to the work. It is not that there is any material force keeping him back; but just an indisposition,—a lethargy he cannot throw off,—a something not to be accounted for in any other way than by admitting that the soul, so far as spiritual energies are concerned, is *dead.* It is not true to say that it is only the Bible that teaches us that apart from God's grace and Spirit, we can do nothing towards salvation: our own experience tells us so just as plainly. Think of an intelligent being, with heaven and hell set before him to choose between, and, feeling that every motive that can act upon the soul impels him to instant closing with the invitations of the Saviour: yet feeling that day after day is passing, and he knows in his conscience he has *not* made choice of heaven, and *not* cast himself upon the Saviour; because something within him,—he cannot tell what,—raises a feeling of weariness and irksomeness and repulsion the moment he begins to think seriously about repenting and believing! "To will is present with me," is the feeling of many a soul; "but how to perform that which is good, I find not." I wish I could believe in Jesus: I wish I could go with all my sins and cast them at His feet: I know that *that* is the only way in which I shall ever be able to feel peace in the present, or to look on to the

future without a gnawing disquiet: I wish to do all that, but I *cannot:* there is something here that holds me back: there is a heart here that is active and interested enough about everything else, but that turns listless and indolent and laggard whenever it comes to the one grand thing, the salvation of my immortal soul! The man's feeling is, "Here I wish for salvation: I wish I could make a great effort and believe on Christ; but easy as it looks, I cannot do it: I cannot *will* to do it!" The thing looks plain and simple;—just to believe in Christ,—just to stretch out the hand and lay hold on Him: and the man wishes to do it: but though he has plenty of energy for everything else, he is helpless and powerless as an infant here. Like a man in a dream, he has not the waking will and energy to stretch out his hand and effectually grasp the wealth within his reach. Ah! there is but one explanation of it all: in a spiritual sense, and as to spiritual energy, the soul is dead. How perfectly Paul's words express its situation: "O wretched man that I am! Who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" But, blessed be God, the power comes with the will to obey the command; "Awake thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead; and Christ shall give thee light."

3. When we look at death, as distinguished from life, a third thing which strikes us as characteristic of it, is, that death is a state of separation.

There is nothing that divides like death. *That* makes a parting which is absolute and complete. *That* cuts off all communication.

It is a sad thing when you bid your last farewell to one who loves you, knowing that you will never meet again in this world; and that in all that is to come and go with each, you can have no more of mutual joy and sorrow. It is bitter to live on, after the pang of parting is over, as time drags heavily by you, a blank waste of days and weeks, and life grows heartless and its glitter wears off, as you feel the slow, wasting pain of separation. But time and space cannot wholly sever hearts; and kindly intercourse and sweet communion may be, though seas roll and mountains rise and years look dark between you;—though you wait for your last change here,—and your little brother of old days toils on, a careworn man, towards his,—away on the other side of the world.

It is a sadder thing to meet with one whom once you knew well and loved much, and whom you love much still: and to find that time, and perhaps not long time, has parted you asunder: to find that change has made him another man from what he was in former days: to see the calculating eye and the altered manner that check your warm remembrances, and chill your warm greeting: to feel that the world has thrust itself between your friend and you; and that the warm-hearted play-mate of your boyhood, the sympathetic companion of more thoughtful days, lives no

more save in the saddened memory of time gone by for ever. But then you may touch strings,—or you may hope to touch them,—that will bring back the past: that will thaw the cold indifference of the present: that will thrill the heart, with electric speed, with electric force, till it beats with the old emotion: that will waken up feelings that seemed gone and forgotten; and make you feel that your friend is still the same.

It is saddest of all to stand by one you love, dead: and to think that though you can yet clasp the cold hand, and look on the cold face, you are cut off from the departed by a gulf across which no word can be spoken and no letter sent,—a gulf to which the great Atlantic is a rivulet. It is strange to think that between you and that which seems so close to you, death has made an invisible barrier to whose dread power of parting very little is added by the closed coffin-lid and the green sod that will soon divide you. The parting was over before *that*. The full bitterness of separation was here before the funeral-day. It was death that divided you, and not the sad things that follow death:—and oh! that perfect parting! Meanwhile, that perfect parting!

Now I think that when we remember that separation is the proper meaning of the word death, and the very essence of the thing death: I think all this casts a light upon the doctrine that spiritual death consists mainly in the separation of the soul from

God. We were all taught this in our schoolboy days; and I remember well it appeared to me a very arbitrary and inexplicable doctrine then: for I could see no resemblance between the separation of the soul from God, and my idea of the body's death. And perhaps we may all have thought, that when you say that separation from God is spiritual death, it just means that *that* is the greatest of all evils; and so you express it by *death*, the strongest of all words. But when we remember that senselessness and helplessness are only the accompaniments and signs of death, but that separation *is* death; *then* we see that it is no arbitrary conventionalism of theological language,—no twisting of words from their natural meaning,—to say that union with Christ, and separation from Christ, make spiritual life and death. Insensibility to spiritual realities, and inability for spiritual exertion, are (we have seen) the sad symptoms of the soul "dead in trespasses and sins:" but it is separation from God that *makes* spiritual death here, and eternal death hereafter. And if we think for a moment, we shall see how completely the soul of the unconverted man is cut off from God. It does not seek its chief happiness in Him. Whenever it seeks it,—and it goes to the world's end, and to every point of the compass, in the search for it,—it never goes to God. It would as soon think of going to the Arctic zone for warmth, as to God for happiness. And then, whatever be the great end towards which the unconverted soul labours,

it is not to do the will of God. That end may be to gain wealth, or honour, or influence: but it is not to gain the favour of God. If they could get all else they strive after, the unconverted would be quite content to do without that. And further, they seldom think of God. "He is not in all their thoughts." And when the remembrance does come across them, of that constant Witness and future Judge, their "meditation of Him is" not "sweet." They are rather relieved when a solemn thought of God has left them; as though it were some dark shadow that clouded their sunshine, some withering spectre that disturbed their rest. They feel a repulsion from thinking of God or holding converse with Him: Prayer is a task-work they would willingly get rid of: and they will admire the perfect character of our Saviour, in any light rather than in relation to themselves. They feel for God's truth the same aversion that they feel for its Author: that is, a dislike to view it as touching themselves. They will admire it generally, or in the abstract, or as relating to others: but when it is pressed home upon themselves, they shrink away from it. The unconverted are, in short, in the language of St Paul, "without God in the world." Nothing, in any strange tongue, is more unintelligible to us while in a state of natural alienation from God, —is more completely out of our sympathy,—than the Psalmist's words, which not merely express his strong feeling, but convey a sober spiritual fact,—a thing

as certain as that hunger craves food and thirst drink, —that memorable "Whom have I in heaven but thee? And there is none upon the earth that I desire beside Thee!"

Thus, then, in senselessness, in helplessness, in separation, you have traced in the unconverted soul the essential signs of death. The Apostle was not capriciously forcing upon words a different meaning from the natural one, when he told those Ephesian converts that before God's grace quickened them, they were "dead in trespasses and sins." We must, in the imperfection of our language, use figurative phrases to convey spiritual facts: but you have seen how true and deep is the meaning of the figure here. I put aside the many awful contrasts between our spiritual and our natural condition which readily suggest themselves in the thought of all this: and desire to bring it all to a practical end. Now, are we living or dead? Have we the characteristics of spiritual life? Are we alive to spiritual things? Do we feel our sin and misery by nature: do we feel our need of Christ? And have we been quickened into spiritual life and energy? Have we been set free from that wretched spell, which makes such even as see something of their need of a Saviour, yet sit still and never go to Him? Have we been enabled, rising as from the dead, to cast ourselves with a whole heart on Him? And are we united to God through

Him? Have we been grafted into the Living Vine? Are we members of that body of which He is the Head? Are we members of that true Catholic church, the great company of All Saints, for all whose members He ever liveth to make intercession? For if we have some good ground humbly to trust that these things are so, then we may cherish the good hope through grace, that in us our Blessed Redeemer hath seen of the travail of His soul, and is satisfied, in some "passed from death to life." So, in St Paul's kindly and hopeful words, "You, being dead in your sins, hath He quickened together with Him; having forgiven you all trespasses: blotting out the handwriting of ordinances, that was against us, which was contrary to us; and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross!"

XIII.

THE WELL-GROUNDED PERSUASION.

"I know Whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day."—2 TIM. i. 12.

WORDS, as every one knows, are intended to convey our thoughts: but sometimes our thoughts are conveyed with special force and meaning, without the direct use of the words which express them. No meaning, perhaps, is ever conveyed so strongly and significantly, as that which is not directly expressed. You may speak of a man; and you may make your reference to him unmistakable; without mentioning his name. You will think of this, looking at the text which has been read in your hearing. It is generally believed that this second epistle to Timothy was the last ever written by the great Apostle Paul: and with a solemnity of spirit becoming a season of danger and of expectation, St Paul would convey to his young friend and brother what it was that he felt as his great support. He had many things to suffer, he said: yet he was not ashamed: and see the reason why. "I know," he says,

"Whom I have believed; and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day." Yet it is not said in Whom St Paul had believed: nor what it was he had committed to One so implicitly trusted: nor against what time the charge so trusted was to be kept. It might have been a very small matter, about which these words were written. They might mean no more than this: "I know such a man's character: I know that he is a trustworthy and honest man: and so I have lent him something on which I set some little value; feeling quite sure that I shall get it back again safe whenever I shall want it." If some one had spoken to St Paul about the cloak which he left at Troas with a friend named Carpus; or about the books and parchments which he had likewise left: and had thrown some doubt upon the honesty or carefulness of Carpus; and had hinted that perhaps the things left with him might not be forthcoming when needed; St Paul might quite well have vindicated his friend's character, and said how sure he felt that the parchments and books were safe; by using just the words which form my text. And yet, I do not suppose that any intelligent reader of this verse had ever the slightest difficulty in understanding exactly what the great Apostle means here. No more solemn and weighty declaration ever proceeded from the lips of clay. The Person whom St Paul had believed, was no other than our Blessed Saviour himself. "*That* committed to

him," was the greatest and most precious trust which St Paul could ever give to another: it was his immortal soul. And the day against which the Redeemer was able to keep that trust, was the great Day of Judgment: the day which shall set right all other days that ever dawned. My friends, what better can be wished to you by those who would wish you best, than that you might be able to take these words for your own?

May the Blessed Spirit of all light and truth, teach us rightly to understand and feel their meaning!

"I know," says St Paul, "Whom I have believed:" and the word which is translated *believed* would be better rendered *trusted*. "I know Whom I have trusted." St Paul would have been a very foolish man had it been otherwise. He would have acted very unwisely if he had trusted any one whom he did not know. There are foolish people who talk of Christian faith as if it meant to believe without any reason: and who seem to think that the more thoroughly groundless their belief, the greater is their faith. If that were so, then the greatest faith ever exhibited was no doubt the belief in their gods which was cherished by the heathens: for while many Christians have very little intelligent reason for their belief, it is quite certain that the heathens had no reason for their belief at all. But St Paul, you see, knew Whom he was trusting: and he trusted the Redeemer because He deserved to be trusted so well. What a

significance there is in the Apostle's words! "I *know* Whom I have trusted!" I know what He is: what He can do: what He has done: I cannot be mistaken here! There are people in this world whom you trust because you do not know much about them: you might not trust them so much if you knew them better. But as for our heavenly Father: as for our gracious Saviour: the more you know of Them, the more simply you will trust Them: for the more you will see in Them of all that makes Them worthy of your entire confidence. You will never find a little flaw of unfaithfulness or unworthiness here: never any of those little failings which sometimes mortify and disappoint you even in the case of human friends who are worthy and good in the main; and whom you have known long, and fancied you knew thoroughly. Now St Paul had known something of the Saviour before trusting his soul to Him: the Apostle would have been a fool to trust Him else: but the Apostle had learned much more by experience since then. Not from the report of others, however trustworthy witnesses they might be: not at second-hand: but from his own personal experience; the Apostle knew his Lord! It is very difficult, indeed, to set out this assurance to others: but there is none that brings conviction like it to the soul that has it itself. And it is an assurance that is always growing, with increasing experience. We all know quite well, that there are people in this world who make a very favourable im-

pression on us at first; but in whom we discern much that abates that impression, upon longer acquaintance. Indeed you have doubtless found, that there are persons who have a taking manner,—a plausibility and fair-spokenness about them,—which grievously mislead you: which make you, at first, think of them a very great deal better than you do when you come to actually see them through. And in truth, it is not the thing that is most taking just at once, that keeps its hold upon us longest, as a general rule. It is not the music, not the picture, not the book, that catch our ear or eye at first, that may possibly keep their charm longest, and only grow upon us as years go on. But surely, my Christian friends, though you saw something of the Saviour's love and power and willingness to save, when you first trusted your souls to Him;—though you could not have trusted Him as you have, had you not seen something of these;—you know far more of them now! You remember Communion seasons in which you found Him at His table: you remember sorrows, losses, bereavements, through which He sustained as none other could: you look back over your way hitherto, and think how wonderfully you have been led, comforted, borne with: you remember how, in all your sinfulness, He received you at the first, and took off the grievous burden, and calmed away your fears: you remember how often He has received and welcomed you since, when you came back, a lost sheep, from a weary wander, to the

fold of the Good Shepherd of souls: and reading in your own life's history your individual reasons for faith and love towards Him, you humbly yet confidently take up the words of the great Apostle; and say "I know Whom I have believed!"

Not as you might wish to know Him, indeed. "The love of Christ passeth knowledge." And not even St Paul, though saying such words, had attained to the knowledge of his Redeemer which he desired. St Paul tells us that his prayer and endeavour still were, "That I may know *Him*." You remember how the great English moralist complained, that after long conversation even with very able and thoughtful men, he had (as he said) "travelled over their minds:" he knew all their stock of thought and feeling: knew all they had to say: knew them so well that their society became something of a weariness. My brethren, it will never be so with the Redeemer! The depths of mercy and compassion for us sinners that are in Him: the inconceivable self-sacrifice: the bitter sense of the unutterable evil of sin: oh how much there is in that kindest heart and that most familiar face which we can never know!

"I know," says the Apostle, "Whom I have trusted." There is something more here than the declaration that he had learned his Saviour's character by personal experience: it is conveyed to us, in these words, how very sure the Apostle was of his ground.

He KNEW! He had not reasoned himself into a conviction, which you might assail by arguments, and perhaps subvert by them: you could as readily shake his belief in his own existence, as in his Saviour's faithfulness and love. My friends, in these days of so keen reasoning upon the most vital matters of Christian doctrine: in these days when the very foundations of our belief are so rudely and so craftily assailed from quarters so unexpected: what a stability it gives a Christian man to be able really to *know* whom he has believed: to feel that he has a foundation to stand on against which no metaphysical acumen is of the least avail! A mere belief in Christian doctrine, without this personal knowledge,—without this actual trial of how the great scheme works,—hangs very lightly on a man: leaves him ready to be carried to and fro with every wind of new speculation: and gives but too much reason for the severe remark of a great and sceptical thinker, who said, "Before you tell me *what* such a one believes, I should like you to assure me that he really believes anything!" And truly, brethren, the Christian faith which is without this personal knowledge of the Saviour, does amount to believing nothing. But as for St Paul, he *knew*. He knew his Lord's graciousness, power, love. He had tried; and found them sufficient. Heavy-laden with sin he came to the Redeemer; and the heavy load was taken away. The law in the members strove with the law of the mind: yet help came from

above; and the Apostle could "thank God through Jesus Christ our Lord" for a great deliverance: for the gift of a sanctifying, enlightening, strengthening Spirit that could bring him safely through all. Great trouble came: the thorn in the flesh struck deep: the messenger of Satan was allowed to buffet: yet so sufficient did the Saviour prove His grace to be,—so perfect was His strength made in His servant's weakness,—that the Apostle could say (and we know *he* meant what he said), "Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me." What could mortal do to shake *that* man's faith and trust! Does he not seem, as in that quiet, resolute fashion he tells out the story of his trust, to look back with a certain humble exultation on the time when God's great grace apprehended him: as though he said, The wisest and best thing ever I did, was when I went to Jesus! There is not a thing in all my life, on which I can look back with such entire satisfaction, and so deep thankfulness. I would do it, if it were to do again, a thousand times over! May it be so, my brethren, with each one of you! May you be as consciously assured of the great realities of your spiritual life, as of the objects and interests of your natural. And so, by God's grace, shall you be able to put aside all doubts and perplexities with the solemn declaration St Paul made before you,—"I KNOW Whom I have believed!"

The great Apostle thus tells us, with the quiet resolution of a man not to be shaken, that he knows, thoroughly well, and knows for himself, One whom he had trusted. And then, in the same indirect fashion in which he points to the best friend, so trusted and so trustworthy, he makes mention of the great charge given and received. "I am persuaded that He is able to keep *that which I have committed to Him.*" There are many things which men may have, and may commit to another. The little means, hardly won, and carefully husbanded, which are to be the earthly support of your children after you are dead: you must have a firm belief in the integrity and good sense of a man, before you entrust him with the care of *that*, after you are gone. And you know how authors, called away before their work was finished, have committed to the care of some tried friend the manuscripts on which they had spent laborious years: and how good men, misunderstood and misrepresented through life, have left to some proved survivor the tender charge of their reputation, to guard it against slander and injustice in days when they should be no longer here to defend it for themselves: and (most solemn charge of all), how the dying parent, thinking in the hour of death not of himself but of his little ones, has commended to one who was nearest the care of those young souls with all their vast possibilities of good and evil, charging that they should so be tended and guided, as that

they should not fail to meet, where partings are done with, upon the Happy Shore. But there is no such act of confidence as that which the Apostle names in the text. There is no such momentous decision made from birth to death by human being, as that which leads a sinful creature to commit his soul,—that is, to commit everything,—to another's care. It is the sum of all religion, it is the great thing there is to do in life, to trust our souls and all their immortal interests to the Redeemer! We have each, my friends, within ourselves, a certain inestimable possession: a soul that must live for ever: a soul capable of being unutterably holy and happy, or of being unutterably sinful and wretched: and we must make up our mind what we are to do with it: whether we are to try to keep it ourselves, or to commit it to some one more capable of keeping it: and St Paul tells us that as for him, his mind was made up on *that* point. He had not merely resolved what to do; —he had actually done it: committed to the Saviour his never-dying soul. He had made the great choice: he had taken the great step: and see how much is implied in it. It means, that the Apostle felt and knew that his soul was not safe in his own hands;—that *he* could not keep it right. It means, that the Apostle felt and knew how safe his soul would be in the Redeemer's hand;—how thoroughly well the Saviour's character and power suited the wants and exigencies of that weary, sinful, sorrowful, anxious

thing, which it is our glory yet our awful responsibility to possess. We do not commit our soul to Christ merely that He may keep it as a curious and interesting thing, like a specimen in a museum, that costs no trouble: No, when we commit our soul to Christ, we give Him *that* which must cost Him labour and sorrow:—we give Him something that has indeed glorious capacities;—but something that is all wrong, that He may make it right. We commit to Him a soul diseased, that He may bring it back to health: a soul with God's wrath hanging over it, that He may take that wrath away: a soul depraved, that He may make it pure and holy: a soul anxious, unsatisfied, disappointed, wretched, that He may make it peaceful, content, happy: a soul weary and heavy-laden, and vaguely wishing for it knows not what, that He may give it rest! And, blessed be His name, our Redeemer is content to take that charge. You do not wonder, when you think that St Paul's eyes were opened by the Blessed Spirit to a true sense of his sinful and lost estate by nature, and to a true sense how completely our Blessed Lord could set him right, and how gloriously bear him through,—you do not wonder that St Paul should be ready and willing to give so terrible a charge as a lost soul, and a charge he was so little fit to keep himself, to the Mighty God, to the Divine Redeemer, to keep and save. But I think the fear which would beforehand arise in a thoughtful mind would be, Will the

Saviour accept such a charge, knowing what His accepting it means? There are valuable things which, for all their value, men cannot afford to take or to keep. You know how, when an Eastern king wished to ruin one of his subjects, he could do all that under a pretext of kindness. The king ruined his subject, by giving him a very valuable present. You know, there is no possession which is esteemed so valuable in those regions, as an elephant. It stamps a man as one of great station and consideration, that he should possess that mighty and sagacious creature. Yet when the king gave the creature to any man of moderate means, the gift ruined the man, because it was such an insufferable expense to maintain it. Yet, being a royal present, the person to whom it was given could not give it away. My friends, the comparison is a homely one: but just think what a fearfully costly present it is the Saviour takes, when He takes from a sinful man the gift of his soul! You do not give Christ your souls to keep and lay by: you give them to Him to redeem, to sanctify, to guide, to comfort, to save. You give them to Him in a dying state: and oh how much must be done, to them and for them, before they can be of the least use or credit to Him! It cost the Saviour His humiliation, His agony, His cross, before He could accept the charge which St Paul committed to Him.

For Christ took the great charge of the Apostle's soul: and he accepts from each of us that great

charge: determined that He will not leave it to abide the lost thing it is when He gets it. He washes away its sins in His own atoning blood. He renews its very nature by the regenerating and sanctifying work of the Holy Spirit: He enlightens its understanding, that was dark: He purifies its affections, which were earthly: He takes the soul diseased, and heals it: He takes it wrong, and sets it right. He receives lost sinners; and through His atoning sacrifice, through the Blessed Spirit's operation, He makes them glorified and blessed saints. All these things, and far more, he does, for "that which we commit to Him."

And that we may obtain all these blessings,—pardon, peace, purity, guidance here, glory hereafter,—all He asks of us is, that we should, heartily and simply, commit our souls to Him. We have to pay no price: we have to fulfil no conditions: you know how run the precept and the promise, "Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved." And you know what is meant by believing in Christ: Just the selfsame thing that is meant by committing our soul to Him. To believe in Christ, and to commit your soul to Christ, denote the selfsame act: and *that* is, to trust yourself, your poor sinful soul, and everything that concerns you for eternity, to that gracious Redeemer, who never will refuse the heavy charge;—who stretches out the arms of His love to take it from us. Oh how fully, how well, how ad-

mirably, the very spirit of saving faith in Jesus is given us in these memorable words: "I know Whom I have trusted; and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him against that day!"

"Against that day!" Yes: and through all the days that are to pass over us till then. "He is able to keep" that great charge which we have trusted to Him. If we are disquieted and anxious: if we are vexed with fears as to how it may go with us in this world, or as to how it may fare with us when we pass within the veil, and when we stand before the judgment-seat: if there be anything in all the untold possibilities of the eternity before us that fills us with apprehension and trembling: the cause is all in ourselves, and not in Him. If He has accepted the charge of our souls from us,—and He *has* accepted it from us if we have heartily given it to Him,—then we are safe! No doubt, there may be a great deal to come and go with each of us, before "*that day*," so solemnly named; and no doubt "*that day*" itself will be a very awful day: but He is able to keep our souls through all. There are perils in the way: there are temptations, sorrows, cares, labours, bereavements: there is many a weary step: and doubtless some dark days await each of us before the last. And somewhere in the Future, near or distant, there is coming nearer us that day, so strange to anticipate, and stranger yet to feel, on which we shall pass away

from this life. There will be, to each of us, a day on which the sun will rise; but we shall not see it go down, in this world. The time will come, in which the clock, that was wound up while we were living, will be going on when we are far away. But through all these things our Lord will keep us, if we do but trust ourselves to Him: You remember the true words of the ancient prophet; "Thou will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on Thee; because he trusteth in Thee." May God's kind Spirit so persuade and so enable each one of us to commit our poor, sinful souls to our Saviour's keeping, as that we may be held in His own peace through all that can come: in all time of our tribulation, in all time of our wealth, in the hour of death, and in the day of judgment! For as our Redeemer was when St Paul trusted Him, gracious and almighty, so is He yet: in grace and love the same.

Yes, the same as ever. To-day, I can say certainly, that our Blessed Saviour has undergone no change in these eighteen hundred years. He has passed from human sight into a world where others may change: but not He. Perhaps the mother is wrong, who lost her child in infancy, and who through all these years has thought of the little one as an infant yet: who looks for a little child to meet her at the gate of the Golden City. The child you lost, and that has been a year in Heaven;—you do not know what she may be like by this time. It may be that

you will hardly recognise the fair spirit that shall wait to welcome you at the gate of pearl, for your own little child; for the young sister that early faded; for the mother that many long years since left you, a little child, to the kindest care of the great Father above us. It may take a little while before you can make out again the face you used to know. We cannot tell what *they* may be: holy and happy, surely: but changed, gloriously changed, from what we used to know. But as for our Blessed Redeemer; as for Him whom we have trusted; *He* is the very same. *He* could not grow better; and so He is the very same. Still loving, faithful, merciful, almighty: Receiver and Saviour of sinners here, Receiver and Saviour of sinners there: Gentle and merciful when He reclined at the first communion-table: gentle and merciful to-day while here at His table, though no longer seen: gentle and merciful as when we shall lay our dying head upon His bosom, and breathe out our poor life there: passing from this life with the great Martyr's words on our lips, "Lord Jesus, Receive my spirit:" and with the great Apostle's assurance in our hearts, "I know Whom I have believed; and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed to Him, against that day!"

XIV.

THE MATERIAL EVIDENCE ACCUMULATING AGAINST THE JUDGMENT.

"For there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known."—MATT. x. 26.

I BELIEVE that there is hardly a declaration in the Bible, that would fill the minds of many human beings with such intense and absolute horror, if they really believed it, as this which has just been read. Most people are much less concerned to think that God knows all their secret thoughts and doings, than they would be to think that men did. In the case of God, all of us who are here, know that there can be no concealment. We know that it is perfectly hopeless to keep any secret from *Him*. And so we just as it were set Him aside as quite out of the question, when we think of those matters, connected with our own life and history, which it would be painful or humiliating should be known. You fancy that a secret is kept close enough, if no one knows it but yourself, and God. You do not feel that God's knowing it, is anything to break down its character as a secret thing. And just

because you are aware that there is no help for it, but that God must know everything about you; you have come to feel as if His knowing a thing were no knowing of it: and as if it remained hidden quite as much as you would wish it, if no one knows it but Him.

But can it be, that a day is coming, which will do away with all concealment whatsoever: which will let the wide universe into the knowledge of the most treasured, and the most guilty secret of every heart: which will set us all in the presence of each other, as we really are, with all pretences stript away? You see the text, and what it says. We have God's own word for it, that "there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known." It is a most solemn thought. Human beings wear many disguises now. Not but what an observer, here and there, if you give him time enough, will see through most of them; and perhaps indeed discern weaknesses in another, which that other does not suspect to exist in himself. Yet, after all, how altered many a one will be on that day that shall put an end to all concealment! Do you think, now, each of you here, that if those who know you knew your secret heart, and many things in your history that you know yourself, they would think as well of you as they do now? Would it be to you a decree of honour, or would it be a sentence of disgrace and woe,—if it were appointed that the moment you cross that threshold, you should rise or sink in the estima-

tion of your fellow-creatures, to just the point at which you stand in the judgment of the all-seeing God? Even if we have the good hope through grace that the Blessed Spirit has in some measure cleansed the thoughts of our heart and the course of our life, does not each of us feel as if we could not bear that any other than our Saviour Himself should fully know how weak we are, how foolish, how evil! Yet the teaching of the text is, that of all the endless amount of thoughts words and deeds that are being stored up in the great realm of the Past, each not only remains a thing for which some one must answer to God in judgment; but each one shall yet be set bare in the eyes of all men;—to admire, to wonder at, to pity, or to abhor! And side by side with that teaching of the text, we are now able to set certain startling generalisations of modern science which cast a new light upon the words; as they show us something of the manner in which the thing they predict can, and may, without a miracle be done.

For we do not mind the declaration in the text so much, when we look on it as telling us about something to be done in a fashion wholly miraculous and inexplicable. When we think that all secret things are to be made known by some special miracle, quite out of the common course of nature, we cannot help fancying that *then*, only the great things about one's life,—and perhaps only the great things about the lives of great men,—will be made

generally known. The mass of little events, little sins, little evil thoughts and deeds, do not seem worth a miracle to raise them from oblivion. It is not worth God's while, we think, to revive such insignificant matters: and under the shelter of our insignificance we shall surely be allowed to pass with little notice. But any notion of that kind is done away, when science tells us the startling but demonstrable fact, that all this destruction of concealment is a thing which may come about in the common course of nature. There need be no miracle about it: no greater miracle (that is) than there is in the commonest things around us; in every rising sun, in every growing and fading leaf. I repeat, that the solemn declaration of our Saviour, that "there is nothing covered that shall not be revealed, nor hid that shall not be known," tells us of something that may come as naturally as to-morrow's dawn, or as the leaves of June or the frost of December. For we are assured that all human thoughts, words, and deeds, are self-registering. They write their own story. They leave their trace: and to make them manifest to all men, all that is needed is just to quicken men's sensibility to perceive that trace. Yes, brethren: all human doings leave their trace: and how can they be concealed?

Can the winter course of the mountain torrent be concealed, if, even on a summer day, when the shrunken stream runs clear through the loose stones,

you discern the great broad channel which it made, when it came down from the hills in the winter-time, brown, fierce, and foaming? The winter waters are gone: they are now far out amid the waves of the Atlantic. But they have registered their passing: they have written their own story here. We can track them, though they are gone.

So is it with our past thoughts, words, doings.

And who, then, is the great Revealer of secrets, that watches men so closely, remembers so well, and is always ready to reveal what it once has seen? Who is this Tell-tale, that may make known what is hid? Just perhaps the very last thing we ever dreamt would do so!

Did it ever strike you that the inanimate scene around you could remember and could be made to reveal all you did, said, or thought?

Sometimes we do not hesitate to talk of our most private matters in the presence of a third party, if we think him so dull that he will not be able to understand what is said, or to repeat it.

Now, just in that way, we have come to regard the elements of nature as things we may safely take into all our confidence. We do not hesitate to speak with perfect freedom to our nearest friend, if there be nothing but the hills and fields and sky, looking on. We do not hesitate then to express our most secret thoughts. Surely, we think, that quiet, undemonstrative witness, that makes no sign, that changes no

feature, as it sees and hears,—surely it does not take in a word of what is passing: surely it will never repeat nor reveal it!

So thinking, we were utterly mistaken. Sometimes you have found that the dull, stupid-looking person, before whom you talked so freely just because you thought he would not understand what you said,—hid, under that stolid exterior, a sharp keen sense;—and was watching every movement, drinking in every word,—though he gave no sign of it.

So is it with this inanimate creation around us! My friends, you had better have done the deed or said the word you wished should be kept secret and forgot, in the presence of a crowd of the quickest-sighted and sharpest-eared people in this world,—than in the presence of the earth you tread on, and the air you breathe. Those quiet, insensate witnesses,—so quiet that you never suspected them,—were watching you with the sharp glance that missed nothing: and they have treasured up all they saw, ready to reveal it again.

Of course, to those of you to whom all this is new, it is startling. But is it not just a fancy? No, it is not a fancy. It is a simple scientific truth; not to be received by faith, but capable of mathematical demonstration. People in old times thought they were using a figurative expression, when they took a pillar or a mountain to witness the transaction it saw or the words it heard. But it was not a

figurative expression. In all the unfanciful gravity of physical science, it was a sober truth. Literally and without a figure, the material creation receives from our thoughts words and actions an impression that can never be effaced; and inanimate nature, for ever, is ready to bear witness to what we have said and done. Let us not think of oblivion. Let us not think that if our past doings have place anywhere, it is only in the memory of God. For they have been incorporated with the very essence of the universe: and there they are; and there they wait that day of judgment, on which the Psalmist tells us, with scientific accuracy, God "shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that He may judge His people." For these are the ready witnesses.

It is not my purpose to deliver to you a scientific lecture. But a little of our time may be very well spent in thinking for a little of such facts as may show to you the truth of what has now been said. The bearing of all this on our religious character is direct and close. It is fit that we should all know facts, scientific or not, that tend to bring more weightily home to our heart the Saviour's declaration in the text. And I believe that all of us will feel it more deeply, if we see something of the way in which it may be fulfilled,—and fulfilled in what we are accustomed to call the common course of nature. And the certain fact which throws new light on our Lord's prediction of the coming end of all concealment, is this:

that every word, deed, and thought, of every human being, traces itself indelibly upon the material universe; and leaves its record for ever written there.

Let us think of our words.

We are accustomed to think that there is hardly anything more evanescent than a word. It is spoken: it falls on the ear: it dies away; and it is done with. And what are we to say, then, when we are told, not as a dreamer's fancy, but as a fact capable of demonstration, that a word is a thing that never dies away; that never is done with; that leaves an imperishable trace? Strikingly has it been said, that "the air is one vast library, on whose pages are for ever written all that man has ever said, or ever whispered."* Now, that was not said by a poet: not by a divine; but by the greatest of living mathematicians. The words that proceed from our lips, cause pulsations in the air, like the circling rings that follow when you throw a stone into the water: and these pulsations, though invisible to human eye, expand away in all directions till they have passed round the whole world, and produced a change in the whole atmosphere: nor have these words died away with one circling of the globe; but they will alter the whole atmosphere through all future time. And what is there needed, then, to bring every hidden word to light, to make every

* Babbage's "Bridgewater Treatise," chap. ix. *On the Permanent Impression of our Words and Actions on the Globe we Inhabit.*

syllable that ever fell from the lips of man a thing which may be read and known of all; but just to quicken our powers of perception till we can discern what we know *is* there to be discerned, if we could just do it: till we can decipher a record truer than all human history, that keeps the impartial tale of every word that ever was spoken? Registered indelibly upon that air we breathe, in letters that are plain and legible already to the eye of God which so easily refers every effect to its cause, and that one word of His may make as plain and legible to our own, there remains every word that ever escaped from the lips of mortal. Hushed and hidden now, yet waiting the day when all secrets shall be revealed, there is written on that viewless expanse, the sentences that were spoken in ages gone and forgot, by lips that have for thousands of years turned to dust, and in languages whose very name has passed away. There are the prattle of infancy, and the parting words of age: there, for ever, lives the lie; the flattering promise of the deceiver; the cruel command of the tyrant; the shriek of agony; the whisper of affection. No matter how tempests have swept, how winds have raged: each atom of air is in some measure what and where it is, because of the force put upon it, it may be ages since: and tells the story, a witness not to be bribed nor silenced. At the judgment-day, when each of us must answer to God for every idle word; when by our words we shall be

justified, and by our words condemned; it will need no living witness to relate all that you and I and all men have ever spoken. Our words, in irresistible memorial, will be there to speak for themselves!

All this, of course, is perfectly familiar to every one who has any acquaintance with physical science. Thus our words are recorded. And equally familiar to many are two different ways in which every deed man does writes its story against the judgment-day.

For one way, every action leaves its trace upon the air and upon the earth, in the same fashion in which we have said our words do so. Undulations in the atmosphere, and impressions upon the earth, preserve the record of every deed of every man. Every one of the atoms that make this globe, is affected in some degree by every step man leaves upon its surface: in a degree no doubt infinitely too small to be perceptible to our present senses, but yet in a degree plain as a mountain to the eye of God; and in a degree which makes "every atom in the globe a living witness to the actions of every living being." But there is another and more striking way in which human deeds are perpetuated.

You are doubtless aware, that though light travels with such inconceivable rapidity, that for practical purposes in this world we may say that it is instantaneous; yet, in fact, even light requires time to travel through space. Thus, when we see any action done, a little distance from us, we do not see it at the

exact time it is done; but a little afterwards: so very little, indeed, that we cannot perceive the difference. Yet, immense as is the speed of light, it takes some eight minutes to travel as far as to the sun: so that a person at the sun, with sight keen enough to see what is passing in this world, would not see each action or event till eight minutes after it had happened or been done. Now, as every one knows, placed at all conceivable different distances from this world, in the immensity of space, there are worlds to which light would take all conceivable different times to go: worlds to which light would take a hundred years to go: some to which it would take a thousand: some to which it would take six thousand: some to which it would take eighty thousand years. Now, my friends, think. Suppose a being now at one of the stars between which and this world light takes a little less than six thousand years to travel: and suppose that being had a sight keen enough to see what was going on in this world (and the thing, we need hardly say, is perfectly conceivable): what would that being now see?

Not the world as it is at present. No: it will take six thousand years before light shall carry to that distant orb, the account of what is passing on this world now. That keen observer, looking down to-day upon this earth, would see it in the bright beauty of Eden. He would see it unfurrowed by the Fall, and fresh from the final touch of its Creator. He would see our first parents in the sinless happiness of

their earlier days. For, swift as light travels, *that* is the latest news it has brought to that distant point in space. Light has been flying on for six thousand years to reach that world: and a spectator looking down on us from it now, would see this world and what is passing on it, not as they are to-day, but as they were six thousand years since.

Let this keen-sighted observer come nearer: take his place on a nearer star; and again look down upon the earth. And looking upon our globe, he sees, sees *to-day*, the lonely ark tossing on the waters of the Deluge. Nearer still; and beneath the oaks of Mamre, green in their picture yet, there is Abraham's tent, by whose door he talked with the Almighty. Nearer still; and by the shore of Gennesaret there walks yet that Blessed Redeemer, Who has been gone to the glory of Paradise for all these years. Nearer still; and some day in the middle ages is before you: great churches are rising, which we know as ruins: great events are happening, about whose circumstances historians here have been debating for generations. Nearer yet; and the earth presents the view of what passed an hour since, or is passing now. And thus, as there are countless hosts of worlds, placed at all possible distances in space from this, so, taking them altogether, they contain a panorama of the entire history of the earth.

Thus, then, still a living present reality, there exists, and will exist through time practically limitless, every

event that ever the light looked on, or the world saw. "Thus the universe encloses the pictures of the Past, like an indestructible and incorruptible record, containing the purest and the clearest truth." The pictures of all occurrences and actions propagate themselves away into space: and though our eyes and our instruments are at present unable to trace them, doubtless the eye of the All-Seeing, as it glances on the universe, sees mirrored there every deed the universe has seen. As though to aid that Divine Memory which never could forget, every deed ever done on earth remains perpetually before God's eye;—preserving its own good or evil memorial;—pressing itself upon His sight. And all that is needed, to realise in its most awful truth the declaration in the text, is just to sharpen our sight to what it might readily be. There needs no intuition into the human heart: no trenching on the incommunicable prerogatives of God. Just quicken our sight to see what we know exists, and what therefore may be seen: and every deed ever done shall be read in a history whose truth cannot be gainsaid: because in it the deed's own story was written by the deed itself.

I might go on to show you how it is now taught by some of the most eminent men of science, that in various other ways, still further records of all human actions are preserved: and how it is maintained, with great appearance of truth, that every thought even,

writes its indelible story too, by certain changes which in the act of thinking are made upon that strange electric fluid that pervades all space and all things. But I think that enough has been said to give us matter for serious thought for one day: if the simple facts of science whose bearing I have been trying to bring out, present themselves before your minds with anything of that fresh, unexpected awfulness, with which, as I well remember, they were first presented to me.* Let it suffice for us to think, that there is reason to know, that the universe is one vast picture-gallery, "in some part of which," as it has been forcibly said, "the entire history of this world, and of each individual, is shown on canvas, sketched by countless artists, with unerring skill." Let it be something for us to remember, that from day to day, it seems almost a certain thing, that our minutest actions, and even our thoughts, are known throughout the universe: that we cannot stir a step, or breathe a syllable, but there is some keen eaves-dropper on the watch, to take that act or that syllable into his keeping, and to keep it till the judgment-day. Let it be something for us to remember, that it seems no unlikely thing, that in the future state for which Christ's people look, when the spiritual body shall clothe the

* As to all the scientific facts stated in this discourse, see Dr Hitchcock's *Religion of Geology*, specially Lecture XII., *The Telegraphic System of the Universe.* The clearness, power, and eloquence of that Lecture are extraordinary.

redeemed soul with quicker and keener senses, even man may be able to read the whole past history of individuals and of the race. Let it be something for us to remember, that the science of men who are too often of no religion, is a thing whose latest and most unlooked-for conclusions serve only to make it more indubitably certain, that "there is nothing covered, that shall not be revealed; and hid, that shall not be known."

So there, my friends, is the evidence accumulating: these are the witnesses, waiting the great day of account. I could have told you of twenty other ways, in which all our doings so incorporate themselves with all physical nature, that their memorial can never be blotted out by any merely natural means. Surely it should do us spiritual good, thus to get a glimpse of the strange realities amid which we live. Going on in this round of weekdays and sundays, year after year, we come vaguely to think that we know everything that is likely to happen; that nothing will ever occur, very different from what we have seen and grown accustomed to; that nothing very awful can be appointed to us. We, living in a well-settled country, free from great convulsions, physical or political, grow insensibly into a kind of unbelief in the awful end and judgment of this world: we need to be often looking to it, lest we grow out of real belief in the justice and severity of God, Who is the Judge as well as the Saviour. It will not do, to be always dwelling on His

kindness and mercy: *that* is not all the truth. And such thoughts as these which have to-day been set before you, may well be blest by the Holy Spirit, to make us feel what an awful mystery is this universe, and our life here: that these things will not fit into the easy-going theories by which we often think to explain them. Now, what is the practical result of all we have thought? There is a hand-writing against us: What shall take it away? Surely the lesson for each of us is, to seek, always more earnestly, to have part in that offered mercy of the gospel, which alone can make us safe from all that is meant by Judgment, —and its wakening up of the many voiceless witnesses whom it shall quicken into life. We can but come, by way of these unfamiliar thoughts, to the old familiar story of the great Redemption of Christ, and of His atoning Sacrifice. Perhaps, in the thought of the inevitable record, ever growing, of all our countless sins and short-comings, we can find a more literal meaning than we have been wont to find, in the words in which St Paul describes the working of Christ's atonement upon saved souls: "You, being dead in your sins, hath He quickened: having forgiven you all trespasses: *Blotting out the hand-writing that was against us*, and took it out of the way, nailing it to His cross." We do not pretend to explain all that was worked out by our Lord's atoning sacrifice, by His precious life and death: doubtless its consequences stretch away into mystery we cannot fathom: But one thing is plainly said; that it does so blot out

His believing people's sins, that they "shall never be ashamed:" not even "before Him at His coming." If not materially, most surely spiritually, the blood of the cross can stop the mouth of the accusing witness, and wash the record of all our sins away. Blotted from the book of God's remembrance, the humbling history of all our transgressions will perish with the perishing universe of matter, and rise against us no more.

We remember, this day, my friends, the words of Apostolic precept and promise: "Repent ye, and be converted, that your sins may be blotted out, when the times of refreshing shall come from the presence of the Lord." Wherefore we turn, this day, to Him against whom we have transgressed, and say, "Have mercy upon us, O God, according to Thy loving-kindness: according to the multitude of Thy tender mercies blot out our transgressions." "Hide Thy face from our sins, and blot out all our iniquities." And thus praying, heartily and humbly, through our Blessed Redeemer, and by the grace of the Blessed Spirit, we may reverently hear the words of comfortable Absolution, coming from Him Who alone hath power to forgive sins; and Who speaks to us as to His children in departed days:

"I, even I, am He that blotteth out thy transgressions for Mine own sake, and will not remember thy sins."

"I have blotted out as a thick cloud thy transgressions; and as a cloud thy sins."

XV.

DYING DAILY.

"I die daily."—1 Cor. xv. 31.

IT is a thing which you can hardly have failed to observe, how very little we are told about the deaths of the first and most eminent of the disciples of our Blessed Lord. With the single exception of St Paul, it is indeed but brief notices we have even of their lives: but with regard to their death, the Volume of inspiration is wholly silent. Yet surely, we think, if the parting scene of the good man be a thing surrounded with interest and replete with instruction,—and if we linger with a great delight on all the particulars attending his departure from this world;—if that be so in the case of Christians even yet, how much more might we judge that it would have been so in the case of those great men who first sounded the trumpet and bore the banner of salvation? It is, we say, with a peculiar interest we look on the Christian as he takes his last leave

of this world: and whether it be the youth or the patriarch, whatever the outward circumstances attending, we feel that there is solemn instruction yielded us as we see how the Christian dies. And we grieve, then, that so little,—so absolutely nothing,—is told us of the parting from this life of the earliest followers of the Redeemer. We should have liked to know, from some better authority than unconfirmed tradition, how the beloved John composed himself to his peaceful departure from this world: we wish we could have learned with what last words of kindness to those around him, with what last tears of penitence for his past apostacy, the sterner St Peter met that death in God's strength from which he had shrunk in his own: we should have liked to know all about it, with what calm but earnest devotion *he* faced his bloody doom, that heroic and single-hearted man, that greatest of apostles, once the persecutor, last the martyr, who had in former days written how he desired to depart and be with his Redeemer, and who had declared he knew that to him to die was gain. We wish all this, but it is in vain we wish it. We have the record of many a dying word that was not worth remembering: we know exactly how many a man died, whose death was no gain to himself when it came, and is none to us to look back on it. We have heard of the sentimentalist who died, as he looked, with glazing eyes, upon a sunset landscape; and of that other who wished that a melody, remembered

from childhood, should fall upon his dying ear: we have recorded all the story of the end of one, who bore the name of philosopher, but who died as the fool dieth, with the unseemly jest upon his lips: of another, better remembered and better loved, who died as he listened to the distant ripple of the river he loved, murmuring over its pebbles: of another whom they propped up with pillows to trace with his feeble hand the lines of wit which were to earn his children bread. And we have heard of things that please us better, and profit us more. We have heard of the death of that gallant old missionary hero, before whom the Hindoo knelt in honour of his simple virtues, and whose soul departed as he finished the last line of a hymn of praise: and the tear has started as we read, in the simple annals of the sainted Richmond, of that humble woman, unknown yet well-known, who from a lowly walk on earth went leaning on Jesus to the happy rest above; and of that "Young Cottager" who died with the words "Christ is everything;" and who sleeps yet, but not for ever, in the quiet churchyard of Brading. But we cannot tell what were the last words *he* uttered in departing, that beloved disciple who had leaned on the bosom of Christ: we do not know how the gentle Luke, who dwells so fondly in his Gospel on all our Lord's kindest words and doings, went to that Heaven of which his Gospel tells us that it is man's best blessing to have his name written there: we do not know how

the Son of Consolation finished that path of sorrow through which he tells us so beautifully that we must enter into the kingdom of God: we do not know how he to whom we always come back, St Paul, last and chiefest apostle, finished his course at last, and took that departure which he told Timothy was at hand when he wrote his last Epistle. We wish to know many a particular, and it might profit us to know many a particular, as to the closing scene of these great pillars of the church: but scripture is silent, and even tradition is dumb.

And perhaps this text may help us to a reason why it should be so. Perhaps the reason is suggested in this text why it was not needful that any formal account should be preserved of the departure of a man like St Paul. You wish to know how he died? Well, then, look at his whole life. He "died daily." His life on earth was such, that all the lessons taught by a common Christian's death, were taught by him even while he lived. Not one counsel could have been breathed by him in life's last low murmur, that had not been anticipated in some one of the sermons which he preached or the epistles which he wrote. Not one degree more in the scale of earnestness or intense feeling, could have been attained as he spake his dying words, over that which had been displayed by him in many a speech in his days of life and vigour. He had said his best, and he had done his best, while he lived: and neither

to his sayings nor to his doings could he add aught when he died.

It is not difficult to understand the general meaning which St Paul meant to convey when he made the declaration which we have taken for a text. His meaning was perhaps generally, that the pains and troubles of his daily life were as great as those of dying; and that he was in daily jeopardy of his life. He meant that he had the thought of death constantly before him: he ran the risk of death every day: he was prepared any day to die: death would not have taken him by surprise, come when it might. *That* was the general tenor of the thought which was present to St Paul's mind when he said, "I die daily." But what I wish in the remainder of the discourse is, that we should try to evolve more fully the ideas contained in this remarkable declaration of his: that we should try to get at some of the various senses in which this declaration is true.

For one way, St Paul said truly that he died daily, if it were only in regard to that vital principle within, which day by day was ebbing, as the tide ebbs wave by wave. Did he think of that strange truth, so little thought of, yet so evident the moment we think of it, that the day we begin to live, we begin to die: that each day consumes so much of the store of life we had to commence with: that each beating of the heart wears it so much out; that each breath we draw

is so much of life used and gone? Did he think, when he wrote the words of this text, how by the daily wear and tear of living, this complicated and most wonderful machinery of our material nature was being worn out? When we are born, we get, as it were, so much life given us:—we get a reservoir filled with life:—day by day we draw so much from it: day by day we use up so much of it: and it is plain enough that the more we draw from it, the less is left. We know how much we have taken from that receptacle, that store of life; but we cannot tell how much remains. There may be very little there to our account: we may have got very near the end of the amount we had to start with: and some day, not long hence, we may find that we have fairly reached the end of it all. But is it not plain enough, that our dying is spread over all the time through which we are exhausting the springs of life? We speak of it as a future thing: we speak of dying as if it were all concentrated on the little point, when the last drop of life shall be drained, and the fountain fairly sunk to the ground and finished. Why, look to any piece of machinery employed by man. The very first day's use of it is so much towards its destruction. It is the daily wear that wears it out. The wearing out is not all gathered upon that closing day, when at last you find it is past working or mending, and throw it finally aside. It is not the last day the locomotive runs that wears it out: the very first on which it

darted away with its train of human beings or its hundreds of tons of merchandise, did just as much towards its final wearing out, as the last on which, a battered weather-beaten thing, it ran its last crazy race. Now, our bodies are just such machines: and, like everything that wears out at all, it is by their daily work they wear out. Every exertion we take out of them leaves so much less behind: every pulse that beats in them is a reason against the next pulse's beating: every breath we draw makes it less likely that we shall draw another: and thus, by the daily consumption of our life, we "die daily."

My friends, it is not only when laid powerless on our bed, with the damp upon the brow, and the mist before the eyes, we bid our last farewell to this world; it is not only then we die. By every step, by every stroke; by every strain on what mind we have; each dies. The sands of life are running as fast in me, when I am preaching to you, as I am wont, this afternoon; as they will at the close of all. And you, as you sit there and listen, are getting just as fast through the stock of life you have to go on, as you will on your dying day. Time will run no speedier, life will ebb no faster, then, than they are doing now. True it is, we are readier to note the running of the last sandgrains: we feel more the rapid passing of moments when we know they are the last: but they will run no faster and no more certainly then, than they are doing now. And though it may startle others

more, when they hear that each of us is dead: though the last step in the series will seem the most decided: though the end will strike men more than the gradual progress towards that end: let us not forget that what we call death is only the final consummation of a process that was advancing through all the days of life: let us not forget that we die daily. And oh let us daily strive and pray so to lay hold on eternal life; so to know our Saviour, and cling to His cross; that the old dismal leap in the dark may be changed into the gate of a peaceful heaven: that through the grave, and gate of death, we may pass to our joyful resurrection!

Another sense in which St Paul might say with truth that he died daily, was this. You know, my friends, that the proper meaning of the word death, is separation: the essence of death lies in separation. We are apt, when we think of death, to dwell so much in the accessories which surround it, as to forget its essence. These accessories, these attendant circumstances, are so affecting and striking, that they hide the thing they surround: just as when we look at the sun, we do not see *it*, but only the light which surrounds it. In like manner, we look at death: but we hardly feel that its essence lies in severance: severance of soul from body, severance of living from dead: for our attention is so much taken up with the things which surround it, that our view stops on them. We see the closed eye, the pale

cheek, the motionless frame: and we say This is death. We think of the pent-up coffin, of the mouldering grave, of the dust to dust returning: and we say This is death. But these things are *not* death. They are things which surround it,—things which attend it,—things which follow from it: they are not the thing itself. No: death rather lies in the breaking of that life-long tie which links body and soul. It is death when a human being is parted, absolutely and completely, from those he loves. It is death, essential death, when you take the cold hand; and it answers with no friendly pressure. It is death, essential death, when you speak to the dull cold ear; but you might as well speak to a stone. It is death, essential death, when you tell your troubles to a heart that once beat in kindly sympathy; but wake no feeling there. That is death. Your friend is dead, when you stand by him: and yet, though standing by him, know that you are parted by a gulf across which no word can be spoken and no letter sent: a gulf that stops the view as completely as a broad intervening ocean: a gulf which absolutely cuts off all communication. Separation is essential death.

Now, does not this thought cast a light on St Paul's declaration that he died daily? Was not his life one succession of partings from those he best loved;—one long parting? Just think of the way in which St Paul spent his life: and see if it was not so. He went and planted a church in some corner of this world: some

little town of Asia Minor or Greece. He knew nothing, perhaps, of that town or of its people before he did so: he went there a stranger: but it was not as a stranger he came away. No: his heart welled out in warmest love to those whose father he was in Christ: He felt for them, he loved them, he counselled them: He knew there were troubles coming to them, in which he would have wished to stay with them and direct and comfort them: but he felt, too, that he was pressed apart from them by urgent duty whose call there was no resisting: and so he left them and never saw them again. He came and saw the Elders of a Church he planted, to which his tenderest love bound him: He heard their story; he told them his: he wished he could have lived and died with them: he kneeled down and prayed with them on the seashore, in the hearing of the waves: and then he bade them his last farewell, and told them they should see his face no more. And it was so every day. Every day St Paul was forming ties which the next day was to sever: Every day, by winning souls to Christ, and so becoming their spiritual father, he was forming a relationship which to him was as close and tender as that which binds the mother to the children of her heart: and from day to day, he was constrained to part, never to meet again on earth, from those to whom his affections were thus bound so closely. The occupation of his life was just to turn those who had been utter

strangers, into closer friends than worldly relationship could make: and then, just when he had brought things to this, that it rent his heart to be divided from them,—*then* to bid them a last farewell. In very truth, if separation be the thing that by pre-eminence *is* death, that way-worn man, weighed down by the thought of a thousand partings, bearing with him the remembrance of a thousand absent friends, might say "I die daily!"

My friends, may not we too say the same? Are not we too, in the daily process of our life, being parted from old friends, old things, old interests and feelings, old familiar faces? We have not reached our resting-place: we never shall, on this side of time. We are gliding on with a silent current, that bears us away and away. How little we have come to care for many things for which we once cared so much! How transitory is this world, and all in it! Even in no more than middle age, when we look round and look back, where are our old acquaintances: the first faces we knew, our father and mother, our school companions; a host of things that once made up the interest of our life? Where are the hopes, the fancies, the affections of youth? Gone, like the leaves and flowers of those departed summers! You go back to the home where you were a child; it is all changed: You visit the school-boy spot; where is all that old life, so full and dear? Ah brethren, God give us grace to seek

the never-fading portion of our wearied souls, in Christ! That best treasure fades not with our advancing years. We change: and all things about us change: but Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever. And some of you may recall to mind the words of the great Reformer, Luther: how he said, "I have had many things in my hands, and I have lost them all; but whatever I have been able to place in God's, I still possess."

There is a third solemn sense in which we may understand St Paul's declaration: it will suggest itself to you when you remember his earnest prayer, that he might be "made conformable to Christ's death." He died daily to some things in the figurative sense in which the word is sometimes used in holy scripture: in the sense in which to die to a thing means to lose interest in it, to get free from attachment to it, to grow out of being under the influence of it. This use of the word has been familiar to us all from childhood. There is a well-remembered sentence in the memory of us all, that tells us how when God's Spirit makes us holy, "we are renewed in the whole man after the image of God; and are enabled more and more to die unto sin and to live unto righteousness." And St Paul speaks of Christian people as those who are "dead to sin." And it is a common phrase, not a theological one, to speak of people as being "dead to the world."

The language, of course, is figurative: but the figure is very just and natural and striking. It means, when we speak of being dead to sin, or dead to the world, that we are as much cut off from these, and have as little to do with them, as a dead man has with the business of this world. Now St Paul was day by day dying to sin, as the work of sanctification went on in his heart. Day by day he was feeling less liking for it, less temptation to it, less tendency in that direction. Day by day he felt its power growing weaker, though still strong enough for all his striving, and too strong by far for his unaided might. In this sense, as to sin, he died daily. And in another sense he did the like. He died daily to the world. That too attractive thing, which finds so much akin to it in the unrenewed heart, and keeps so firm a hold of it, had little enough part in St Paul. He was all but quite dead to it: he was daily dying to it. The ties that bound him to it sat so light, that at any time it would have pained him very little that they should be wholly severed: and the desires of worldly wealth, or fame, or pleasure, had all but withered into total death, in him who gloried in nothing, save in the cross of Christ. Truly St Paul died daily: but he had been more successful in dying to the world, than in dying to sin. He had got further on in *that:* he was nearer being quite dead, *there.* You might almost as well have offered an earthly bribe to a dead man, as to St Paul. You might almost as well have played off

an earthly pageant before the stone-blind eyes of death, as have thought with *that* to dazzle or to win the great Apostle of the Gentiles. But as regarded sin he had more to do. He tells us that dying though it might be, its dying struggles were hard: that the law in the members would not yield to the law of the mind, but by a painful effort: that sometimes, fighting the good fight, even with all the mighty help of the Blessed Spirit, he found himself a wretched man. My friends, there is comfort here for us, in our Christian work and warfare. If St Paul was no more than dying daily to the world and to sin; if even he could not say that he was entirely dead to them; need we wonder if we find, in spite of our best prayers and endeavours, that our souls often "cleave to the dust:" that even when to will is present with us, yet how to perform that which is good, we find not: for the good that we would we do not; but the evil which we would not, that we do. Yet, by the grace in us of the Holy Ghost, we must seek to be gaining always a little, as months pass on: getting the mastery over our evil tempers and tendencies; mortifying the sin that doth most easily beset us, whatever that may be: in this sense dying daily: "our old man being crucified with Christ, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin:" cheered through all mortifications by the comfortable thought, that "if we have been planted together in the likeness of His death,

we shall be also in the likeness of His resurrection." Oh that we may all be dying daily to everything displeasing to our Saviour, in that we feel less temptation to it, more aversion to it, more indifference to the old things that used to lead us wrong, a growing bent towards what is good, pure, and true! For *that* is dying to sin and living to righteousness. That is being sanctified. That is being made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light: into which we cannot enter above, unless in some measure we grow fit for it below.

How shall we, my friends, so retain in our thoughts the daily wearing of our mortal life, as that we may make it conduce to our daily preparation for the life immortal? You may have read how in days long departed, one who was a good man and a true and humble Christian, though he was a Jesuit priest,* thought to do this by holding the tokens of his coming end always before his eyes. For, in his little cell, there was set (now beyond all the cares that used to fever it) the featureless skull; and beneath it the bones were laid across: and, continually at his bed's head, the first thing to catch his waking eyes, there stood the narrow resting-place wherein his body was to be laid to its long repose. I have read the simple lines in which that good man tells us of the means he

* Robert Southwell, born 1560; see his Poem—*The Image of Death.*

took to keep death thus before him; and of how hard he found it with all this to remember his latter end. I would not wish, that any such gloomy memorials of our departure from this life, should be found within our dwellings. It is God's manifest purpose that the remembrance of the end of the pilgrimage should oftentimes be no more than latently present in our mind: not to be stimulated by any means savouring of the ghastly: but rather gently awakened by many quiet reminders that come to us as we go on our way. Lessening hopefulness, enfeebled powers, returning spring-times from which the vernal joy has in great measure fled, and the thought of a hundred interests that have gone from our lives, may serve to remind us that we are passing away. Oh for a firmer hold of the solid realities of the better world: oh for the firmer faith in Christ! So shall we look, "not at the things which are seen, but at the things which are unseen: for the things which are seen are temporal, but the things which are not seen are eternal." So shall we "know" our Saviour, "and the power of His resurrection; being made conformable unto His death!"

XVI.

NEW-YEAR'S-TIME.

"I therefore so run, not as uncertainly: so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away."—1 Cor. ix. 26, 27.

ALWAYS solemn, always something to make one think, always full of warning and of counsel for every one who claims to be a Christian, these words are especially so to-day. For the first Sunday of a New Year is one of those marked seasons, which make even the least thoughtful of our race look back upon the Past, and look onward to the Future. And in these verses, we see the great Apostle Paul doing all that. For in his grave words, there is a latent reference to the Past: there is an awful statement as to a possibility in the Future: there is a deliberate declaration as to a resolution for the Present. All these things, I shall show you, are contained in those verses which we all know: and all these things concern you and me, here upon the threshold of another

year, just as much as ever they concerned that great Apostle, whose earthly years are all fled.

There is a strong tendency in human nature, when we have fairly succeeded in doing a thing, to think,—There, *that* is done: I can always do *that* again. Now, in the moral and spiritual world, to think so is a great mistake.

It does not at all follow, because you have overcome some temptation,—put down some evil tendency within you,—that you are to be troubled with *that* no more. It does not at all follow, because you really feel some love to Christ,—some comfort of the Holy Spirit about which there can be no mistake,—some faith to trust your soul simply to your Redeemer, and to leave all that concerns you cheerfully and humbly to your God,—it does not follow that it will be always so. And at this outset of a New Year, it is fit that Christians should remember this; and should feel that they must work on, as diligently as ever. We are not to think; because we have already some measure of faith, and hope, and charity, that we shall always have at least as much;—that the tide of our better life will never ebb below *that* mark;—and that if we have already, as we think, enough of religion to save us, then we are quite sure to be saved. We are not to fancy, that because some degree of the kindly fruit of God's Blessed Spirit does now appear in our heart and life,—some little peace, and joy, and genial regard towards all, and lowly estimate of our-

selves, and willingness (if we know ourselves aright) to do and bear whatsoever it may please God to appoint us,—we are not to fancy that these may never be blighted, and leave us desolate. As we look back, to-day, upon the year that is gone, we may well take hope and comfort from the Past, and from God's goodness in it: but we are not to draw from the Past a lesson of sloth, a lesson of vain confidence, or an inducement to cease to watch and pray. No: each day must bear its burden. You cannot live on last year's bodily food: and just as little can you rest perfectly safe in last year's spiritual attainments and doings. Perhaps in this last year, you have trained yourself to a more ready and habitual recognition of God's hand in all that comes to you: you have trained yourself to live more as in the atmosphere of His presence: to be always ready, through your common duties and cares, to look up to Him;—and if only by a moment or a silent word of prayer, to cast upon Him the little burdens that are coming down upon us all, hour by hour: and it is something to have done this: but do not think you are sure never to go back from it, if you cease to take pains to keep it up. If we are to maintain our spiritual life, my Christian friends, then through this year before us, if God be pleased to spare us through it,—we must be just as careful as ever. *That* is the great lesson of St Paul's memorable words which form my text: *that* is the lesson for all Christian people who are here to-day.

St Paul, you see, does not say, I have felt so much of Christ, and I have done so much for Christ, that surely there is no fear for *me*. Nay, the very contrary of that. He is resolved that he will only be the more careful and diligent, lest a fearful fall come after the attainment of those great privileges he has already enjoyed. Whoever may be heedless, whoever may cease to watch, whoever may let temptation have its way, it shall not be he who was caught up into Paradise, and heard its words of unutterable joy: it shall not be he to whom, though less (in his own judgment) than the least of all saints, the great grace was given of declaring to his fellow-sinners the unsearchable riches of Christ: and so his words are, let us mark them well,—"I therefore so run, not as uncertainly: so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection; lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away!"

The imagery under which the Apostle sets forth his determination not to rest in the belief that what he had already done and experienced made him safe, but rather to work and watch on as diligently as ever, would be very familiar to the people to whom it was first addressed. The imagery is taken from the Games which in old times were wont to be celebrated near the city of Corinth: and the usages of those sometimes brutal exhibitions were recalled by the great Christian preacher to make his meaning

more clear and forcible. He reminds the Corinthians, that the Isthmian racers all ran energetically, though but one could win: and exhorts *them* to run with all their heart in that nobler race, in which there is a prize for each and all,—and in which the reward gained by one racer is not taken away from another. He reminds the Corinthians that the man who sought for victory in the athletic exercise of wrestling or of boxing, tried by all needful self-denial to bring his body into its most vigorous and muscular state: and then he suggests that if the Isthmian wrestler was content to go through all that painful discipline to gain a fading crown of olive or laurel, surely the Christian warrior, to gain an incorruptible crown, of happiness and of glory, might do as much, with more trying enemies to contend with. And so St Paul comes to his own purpose and resolution. As for me, he says, I run in the race, not as uncertainly: not (that is) as one who does not know what the goal is he makes for: I know the thing I want; and I hold *that* steadily in view; and I shall not be tempted to turn aside from it. And I engage in the good fight, not like the unskilled athlete who misses his aim, and whose blows fall upon the empty air: I know (he seems to say) that sin and Satan and my own evil heart are arrayed against me and are ever near me; and I cannot afford to throw away even one strong stroke: every one must get home, every one must tell! And to the end that I may do all this, I keep down, by

God's grace, all those evil dispositions arising from my fallen nature, which would hinder me in the battle and in the race: "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection:" it shall know its master, in the better part of me, the regenerated soul! And then comes the end of all this. It was, lest that by *any means*,—through some unlooked-for and unthought-of conjuncture, of circumstances and temptations, even the great Apostle, after all his Christian work and experience,—after having, in simplicity and sincerity, as he thought, pressed upon other men the overwhelming care of their soul's salvation,—might yet come short of Heaven at last. Oh the solemnity, oh the pathos and the warning, of the words of one whose preaching had perhaps saved the souls of thousands: who in persecution and contempt, in cold and hunger and nakedness, had given strength and life to the work of leading immortal beings to the Redeemer: yet who felt that in this world of many temptations, of fearful possibilities, of inconceivable changes, he was not quite safe with all! "Lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a cast-away!"

He did not look like it, indeed, standing in the presence of a crowd of perishing sinners; and with burning zeal in his heart, feeling that he could be content to do or suffer anything if he could but save souls; with his earnest purpose shown in the feeble limbs, in the trembling hands, in the weary frame in

which he always bore about his Master's dying, beseeching them in Christ's stead that they would be reconciled to God. You would have said that if anybody in this world was *safe*,—and need watch and toil and fear no more, it was the great Apostle Paul. Yet it was not so. It would not be so, if he left off watching and praying. And oh brethren, the lesson and warning for us this day! From the pulpit in God's house, from the holy communion-table, from the Sunday-School, from the closet with its earnest outpouring of the very heart to God, from the sense of Christ's love and grace, from the confident assurance of the indwelling of the Holy Spirit,—human souls may end in woe! Only by constant watchfulness, by constant prayer and pains, can *that* be prevented. And blessed be God's name, if the sense of our danger do but keep us ever humble, ever watchful, ever prayerful,—we shall be safe indeed.

Now, let us remember this great truth, as we enter upon another year; that as regards our spiritual life, it is only by striving to be always going onward, that we can make sure we shall not go backward. It is only by continually putting down temptation,—"keeping it under, and bringing it into subjection,"—like St Paul, that we can make sure it shall not prove our ruin. And this is the lesson which we ought every one to take with us, as we enter this untrodden tract of time.

This is a peculiarity of spiritual progress. You have all, no doubt, some time climbed a high hill. Half-way up, you felt out of breath and tired. And having come to some inviting spot, you sat down and rested for a little, before passing on to the summit. Now, of course every one knows that in such a case as that, though when you sit down you cease to make progress, you do not go back. You do not lose the ground already gained. But if you ever seriously reflect, you must have discerned the sad truth, that in respect of another and more important kind of progress, unless you keep going on, you begin to go back. You struggle, in a spiritual sense, up the steep slope: and you sit down at the top, thinking to yourself, Now *that* is overcome. You have, by God's grace, broken yourself of some sinful habit: mortified some wrong feeling: attained some little advance in some Christian grace. But after resting for a while, you look round; and lo! insensibly you have been sliding down: and you are back again at the foot of the eminence you climbed with so much pains and toil.

And this text reminds us, that in regard to the worst and most fatal enemies with which every Christian soldier has to fight as he goes on through life, all this holds especially true. It was not enough that St Paul should once for all beat down the sinful nature within him; and, finding he had for the time brought it into complete subjection, fancy it would

never trouble him any more. It was needful that he should be seeing to it constantly. It is not enough, Christian brethren, that you put down your besetting sins for once;—that you cut down, for once, some evil disposition within you, ever so severely. In your inexperienced days you will do this: and then, seeing that the evil disposition is quite cowed for the time, you will fancy it will vex you no more. But you will discover, to your painful cost, that the root of bitterness within you is not so easily extirpated: that the in-born corruption must be watched as long as we live: and that though true it is that the Devil, being resisted, will flee, yet certain it is that he departs from us, as he did from our Master, only for a season; and that he will return. And so, our soul's worst assailants, though unsparingly put down, keep always reviving, and struggling to their feet again: a little weakened at first; but in a very short time as vigorous and mischievous as ever.

There is something very striking in the way in which St Paul indicates, in the text, the thing of which he stood most in fear. It was his own fallen nature which, apart from God's grace and Spirit, might in the end make even the great Apostle "a cast-away." And so, to prevent that awful conclusion, you see the thing he specially does: "I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection." And it is plain that by *the body*, St Paul means the same thing which Holy Scripture speaks of as *the flesh*;—that is to say,

the whole fallen nature that is in every human being, and all its wrong impulses. And these, indeed, are our worst enemies. "A man's foes," by special eminence and distinction, are even nearer him than "they of his own house:" A man's worst enemies are they of his own heart and soul. The enemies that do you most harm, and perhaps that cause you most suffering, are tendencies and feelings in yourself. If all within the citadel were right: if the troop of thoughts and affections *there* were orderly and well-disposed and well-guided: we should be very independent of the enemies outside. Outside temptation can never make a man do wrong, till something inside takes it by the hand, and fraternises with it, and sides with it. The bad impulse within must take up the bad impulse from without, and introduce it to the Will, before the bad impulse from without, however powerful it may be, can make man or woman go astray from right. But every thinking person knows this: what many people do not know so well, is, that the good fight of faith can never end but with life;—that in contending with these worst enemies, it is not enough just for once to cut them down and subdue them. Once, by God's grace, cut down self-righteousness and self-sufficiency in your heart, till you feel that you are "clothed with humility:" once, cut down worldliness of spirit within you, by the help of that faith which "overcometh the world:" once, cut down that narrow intolerance, that unchristian uncharitable-

ness, which is so natural to us all, and come to feel as if you could love and acknowledge as brethren all whom Christ loves,—all who are going to heaven, though they may not be going exactly by your way: once cut down the unthankful gloom of care, and cast all your care upon Him whose name is now, as ever, Jehovah-Jireh, The Lord will provide: once cut down the ugly head of envy, or self-conceit, or unworthy ambition, or hasty and unkind speaking of others: and you need not plume yourself that you will not be troubled any more with these. Let us call to mind, each of us, this day, the sin which doth most easily beset us: each of you knows what it is: and let us solemnly recognise the fact, that though you never willingly give it a moment's quarter,—though you steadfastly cut it down every time it obtrudes itself,—still in a little while, after you have left it for lifeless, it will be up again, as strong as ever. And if you would not have that sin cloud all your Christian character, and destroy your peace, and embitter your nature,—yea if you would not have it spread like leprosy till it kills out the better life in you, and makes you in the end "a cast-away;"—you will do as St Paul did, see to it constantly: you will "keep it under," and "bring it into subjection," by God's grace, day by day, and hour by hour.

Or, to go back to our first imagery, you have climbed, by a hard and long-continued effort, by the prayers of hundreds of nights and mornings, by many

hours of self-examination, by much painful self-denial, by many sacraments, by much looking to Jesus, by much seeking after the aids of the Holy Spirit,—up to a certain spiritual elevation. You have reached a position, climbing up the great ascent that leads to God, at which you feel, as you think, a real living faith in Christ, a real love towards God as seen in Him. You feel resigned to God's will; and kindly-disposed to all your fellow-creatures, even to such as have done you a bad turn already, and will not fail to do the like again. You feel as if your heart were not set, as it once used to be, upon worldly aims and ends: but as if you were really day by day working towards laying up your treasure and setting your affection above. You feel humble: patient: charitable. You are ready to sit down there, on that spiritual elevation, satisfied with yourself: and thinking to yourself, Now, I am a humble, contented, kindly, Christian person: and I am so for life. And let it be said thankfully, If you keep always on the alert, always watching against any retrogression, always looking and seeking for a strength beyond your own, —you may remain all *that* for life. But if you grow lazy and careless, in a very little while you will have glided a long way down the hill again. You may be back again at the very rudiments of the Christian life: needing to lay anew the foundation of repentance from dead works and of faith in the Redeemer. Do not fancy that because you have been (as you fancied)

once right, you can never go wrong. The spiritual enemy that seemed most thoroughly beaten, may (apart from God's grace) beat us yet. You remember, for nobody can forget *that*, how the publican, when he went up to the temple to pray, expressed himself in a lowly fashion which has been handed down to all ages with the stamp of God's approval upon it. Yet, for all his speaking so fairly then,—for all those downcast eyes, and those becoming and penitent words "God be merciful to me a sinner,"—the day might come when, having grown a reformed character and gained general approbation, he would stand in a conspicuous place and thank God that he was not as other men. Let us trust that day never came. Yet, if the publican had said to himself, as he went down to his house, Now, I have attained an admirable pitch of humility and penitence: I am all right: I am a model for future generations: that day would be very likely to come. Yes, "Pride goeth before destruction; and a haughty spirit" and a self-confident spirit "before a fall." I have no doubt that if St Paul, after having learned to be content, had ceased to see to *that*, he would gradually have grown a grumbler.

And so, you have seen the great principle which is in the text: that however great your Christian attainments, however happy and encouraging your Christian experience, you must not grow heedless or idle, but continue as watchful and diligent as ever, if you would not fall away. All the joy you

have had in hearty and peaceful communion-seasons: all the earnestness with which you have sometimes been enabled to pour out your heart in prayer: all you trust you have known of the express and manifest working on your heart of the Holy Spirit: all you have felt of the peace of God, which passeth all understanding: all these Sundays we have worshipped in this church: all we have experienced here of our Saviour's presence according to His promise: all these things do not make sure that we shall never fall from grace and end in woe, if we cease to watch and pray. And you have likewise seen, in this text, the way in which we may, by God's grace, persevere to the end. It is, to keep down the evil tendencies of our fallen nature: in short, to battle with temptation whether from within or from without: to allow ourselves deliberately in nothing that we know to be sinful, but by the blessing of our true and sympathising Friend, the Blessed and Holy Spirit, to resist all *that* to the death. I have not gone into the details of St Paul's special case: for the great principle that breathes from his words concerns not merely those who preach the Gospel, but all believers as well: and to all, it would be a fearful aggravation of the final loss, if after enjoying great Christian privileges, after experiencing something of God's grace, they should be cast away in the end. It is always sad, to think that our purer and better feelings are being outgrown: to think that as we go on, in our

track through life, we are falling off from what we used to be: but it would be a sadness beyond all expression, to be constrained to feel that in Christian grace, in faith and hope and peace in believing, we are going down-hill: turning cold and heartless: going down that terrible descent which ends in woe! Let us begin this new year, then, determined to be always on our guard; to watch against that slothful, worldly spirit which is always ready to grow upon us: to give no quarter to sin, more especially our besetting sin: remembering that in this world we are always in the enemy's country; and that the most fearful possibilities of sin and misery hang over the heedless and secure. If even St Paul felt it, much more may we, that we never shall be safe till we have reached that Place, where no temptation, no spiritual enemy, can assail us more. The day will never come, in this world, on which it will be safe for us to sit down in entire security; and to say to ourselves, Now we need keep no watch,—we may fall asleep,—and nothing will meddle with us the while. Nay, even to the end,—even to the last New-year's-time that we are to see,—we must still run, not as uncertainly; and fight, not as one that beateth the air. For all around us, there are the enemies of our souls and our salvation: influences within and without that lead away from God; and which must be kept under, and brought into subjection, lest that by any means, after all our church-services, and all

our solitary prayers, in these years that are past, we ourselves should be cast-aways!

We have the way before us yet, my friends: how much or how little God only knows. As for that good man of whose words we have thought at this time, *his* way is finished: centuries are passed since his last sun went down here. We have thought, for our warning, of words he wrote when he, like us to-day, was looking forward to coming time, not knowing what-like it might be. And as we close, we may think, for our encouragement, of certain other words he wrote, after he had carried out the resolution stated in the text for a few more years; and when now the shore of the Better Country loomed very near. His counsel to us is, "Fight the good fight of faith:" and what he advises us to do, he does himself, and he means to do through life: "I fight, not as one that beateth the air." And when, at last, Paul the aged, very near his end, is looking back upon his life in this world, and speaking of it as something *past*, you see what he thinks of that old resolution, so faithfully kept: you see how he thinks his plan of living has answered; and whether it has proved satisfactory on the whole. There is an end of all uncertainty now: Life is not now to be lived,—*that* has been done: it remains only to sum up the result of it. Who can forget the words?

"For I am now ready to be offered, and the time

of my departure is at hand. I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, shall give me at That day."

Yes: the plan had answered! And as it answered with him, it may with us. And at this season of kindly wishes, when many pilgrims, each a little weary and a little care-worn, seek by cordial words a little to cheer each other's hearts, and help each other in the way; what better could our kindest friends wish us, than that ours may be St Paul's prospect for the Future; ours St Paul's purpose for the Present; and ours St Paul's survey of the Past!

XVII.

HAMAN.

"Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate."—ESTHER v. 13.

I HAVE no doubt at all, but that almost all who are here present are aware of a very noticeable peculiarity about this Book of Esther, from which I have now taken my text. In one respect, this Book stands quite by itself in the number of those which make up the Bible. And its distinction, just at the first thought, is anything but a promising one. In the Book of Esther, the Name of God is not mentioned so much as once. And truly, seeing that the Bible is God's Word, it does appear strange that in so large a portion of it there should be no mention of His Name. But, when we think better of it, and when we make ourselves acquainted with the history, we shall feel that though God's Name be not there, His Providential working, His ordering of all things, His constraining human wickedness and folly to conduce just to His purposes,—meet us everywhere. Nowhere in the Bible are God's wisdom and power

more plainly set before us, than in the Book where His Name is not written, even once. Yet ignorant and foolish people have been unable to see this: just as ignorant and foolish people have been unable to see that a sermon may be leavened, may be saturated with the spirit of the Gospel, though it contain no complete account of the whole evangelical system of doctrine: while on the other hand, a sermon may set out the entire system of Christian theology, yet utterly fail of being what true Christians will recognise as the preaching of the Gospel of Christ. It is a finer thing,—a higher thing,—to have the Gospel spirit transfused into one's teaching,—than to do what I believe was common in Scotland forty years ago,—set forth the entire metaphysics of the plan of Redemption in every discourse: the result being that a Christian congregation had, in many cases, to listen to just the same sermon over again every Sunday, year after year; with what result upon the interest and attention of young hearers, need not be said. And even so, if we read the Book of Esther with prayer that God's Spirit may give us the spiritual understanding of it, we shall find that though express statements as to God's over-ruling Sovereignty and Providence be lacking, these are taken for granted in every page and almost every verse: and thus pressed upon us in the most solemn and affecting way.

I need not say to you, that though "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God," and is profitable in

many ways, this does not mean that every chapter or every Book in the whole Bible is of equal importance. There are precious gems in the Word of God: little sentences which tell us very much about our Blessed Saviour and our Blessed Comforter: sentences which we shall read a thousand times for once that we shall read much of the keen worldly wisdom of Proverbs, or the sound teaching of Esther concerning God's providential government: sentences which we weave into our prayers, and think of at the Holy Communion-Table, and repeat to mourners and sufferers, and whisper to dying ears, and shall have (we trust) on our own lips as they are growing cold when we die. The entire New Testament is a great advance upon the Old: the Day is better than the Dawn. And those inestimable Psalms, so true to Christian experience to the last of time: those words of the Prophets, who in clearest vision beheld the coming Redeemer; —those Mosaic rites in which our Saviour was so plainly prefigured;—these are the portions of the Old Testament which must ever be most precious to believing hearts. Now let us not pretend to reckon the Book of Esther among these. I never preached from a text in it till now: I never read a chapter from it in public worship; not but what it is all good, but that it is not much one can read here, and I knew where to find better. The Jews, as some of you doubtless know, held this Book in special veneration, preferring it to certain of the Prophetic books: You

can easily see that a Book recording how God had been pleased wonderfully to provide for the national preservation, would, to worldly hearts, be far more pleasant reading than books filled with sharp rebukes for national sins. We have no such inducement to over-rate the Book of Esther: yet we can see that it is full of sound instruction; and perhaps we may find, in thinking of the special passage which forms my text, that there is something more in it than a most truthful exhibition of fallen human nature; something more in it than lessons of worldly wisdom and of pure morality: yea, that being rightly considered, there is *that* here which directly points us to our Blessed Saviour, the only rest for the weary soul, and the only satisfying portion of our ever-craving nature.

It is a sad picture of life and society that is set before us in the Book of Esther. We are told of a certain mighty monarch, named Ahasuerus, and better known in secular History as Artaxerxes. But we find that this mighty monarch was no better than the poor wretched slave of his own pride and passion. He governed, we are told, a hundred and twenty-seven provinces: but it is very plain that he had never learned to govern himself. There is not a good thing told about him from first to last: and secular history exhibits him as even a more despicable fool than the inspired does. This is the creature who, when some of his ships had been wrecked by a storm at sea, ordered that the sea should be punished by

being flogged; and who actually caused many lashes to be laid upon the unconscious waters. This is the man who, to make the sea understand that he was its master, ordered it to be chained, by having great fetters of iron cast into it. And sure enough, his commands were carried out by his ministers and generals, who did not dare to expostulate with the great overgrown baby they served. Truly, the entire exhibition of the state of society at that most profligate and wicked Court, which we find in the inspired Book, is fitted to fill us with wonder at God's patience in bearing with man's sin and folly.

We do not dwell upon the wretched picture. Those who doubt that our race is utterly fallen and depraved and alienated from God, may very profitably consider it. But what we desire to do at this time, is to use, not the telescope but the microscope; we do not wish to take a large view of a deplorable condition of human affairs, but rather to fix our attention on one little point, and to try to find out what there is in it.

There was a certain man, his name was Haman, who had gained the utmost favour of King Ahasuerus. We do not know how Haman gained *that:* but looking to his own character and to that of his master, we may conclude that it was by being more servile, more crafty, more unscrupulous in carrying out the king's wishes, than the rest of the crew of courtiers. You remember how a great English statesman, desir-

ing to account for a certain man's becoming a favourite of a remarkably wicked monarch, said that we might probably be safe in supposing that the man, in a humble degree, was something like the monarch himself. However that might be, Haman had reached the very zenith of dignity and success. He had got everything that heart could wish. But all this while a certain Jew, one Mordecai, when all other men were bowing before Haman and reverencing him, would not bow, nor do him reverence. And there was something in that calm, resolute look, that seemed to pierce Haman through, and to discern what a bad, poor creature he was under all his trappings; that Haman could not bear. He felt that Mordecai had taken the measure of him; and newly-blown dignity cannot stand *that*. At last, things came to a crisis. The chronic discontent of Haman's soul grew acute, and unbearable. There was a day, on which the great minister of state was honoured with the supreme honour of an invitation to a banquet with the king and queen alone. No greater dignity could, in that land and age, be accorded to a subject. Many people doubtless envied the prime favourite, as he came forth from the palace (so the inspired story tells us) "joyful and with a glad heart." But even in that moment of triumph, a damp fell upon Haman's exultation. There, sitting at the king's gate, not stirring for Haman, was Mordecai: there was the immovable face, with its look of utter disregard, perhaps

of quiet contempt. Haman burned with indignation: the weak man was content to hold his peace of mind at the pleasure of an unmannerly Jew. But he restrained himself for the time: in his master's presence he had doubtless learned to do *that:* and he went away to his splendid home. Then followed a most singular manifestation of human feeling. Haman was not one who could keep his troubles to himself. He sent for his friends; he called for his wife. He "told them of the glory of his riches, and the multitude of his children, and all the things wherein the king had promoted him, and how he had advanced him above the princes and servants of the king. Haman said moreover, Yea Esther the Queen did let no man come in with the king unto the banquet that she had prepared but myself; and to-morrow am I invited unto her also with the king. Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I see Mordecai the Jew sitting at the king's gate!"

My friends, human nature is always human nature. All this was hundreds and hundreds of years since: that flutter of mortification in which the king's favourite came to his home that day, has been cold in dust for ages: yet we have all seen the selfsame feeling; perhaps some of us need to strive against it day by day. God has given you many things, perhaps; but not the one thing more on which you had set your heart: and you are tempted ungratefully to feel as if all you have got avail you nothing. You see

how it was with Haman. He had got almost everything: but the one thing denied, close to his eye, shut all the rest out from view. There was a fly in the ointment, that spoiled it all. There was a sepulchre in the garden, that took the greenness from it all. There was a skeleton in the house; and the peace and comfort of the house were gone. There was a bitter drop in the cup, and all the cup was made bitter as gall.

And now, my friends, we dismiss Haman from our view; and the peculiarities of Haman's case. We might spend time in thinking what a petty, small-minded, malicious, unscrupulous person he was. But all this would be more curious than profitable: and what I desire is, to bring these things to a bearing upon ourselves. In these days of redressing the old estimate of human beings, the day may come when it will be shown that Haman was an unselfish, unambitious, and amiable man. But even should that ever be, it will not shake the soundness of the teaching we draw from the text, viewed as the statement of a fact in human experience and feeling.

Let us, before coming to the greater matters which the text suggests to us, think of certain smaller truths and lessons.

And one of these is, that it is very foolish to keep brooding upon painful and disagreeable things in our circumstances and lot: keeping the perpetual remembrance of these rankling in our hearts. *That* is the

way to make ourselves miserable, discontented, and unthankful. We should train ourselves rather to think of the blessings God gives us, than of those He denies us. Take warning from that unhappy Haman, who kept vexing himself about the disrespect shown him by Mordecai, till that one thing blotted out his riches, his glory, his children, his home, everything,—and made all these "avail him nothing." Of course, this was a terribly morbid state of mind to come to: but I am not sure but we could each of us name several persons we know who have approached very near it. Perhaps there have been times when we came a great deal too near it ourselves. And in this age and country, where ordinary Christian people are not commonly tempted to gross outward sins,—where the sins into which Christian people are most prone to fall are mainly sins of temper, of heart, of speech; I do really think that we fail to enough remember that these moods of mind form part of our Christian character, whatever that is; and that to put these away from us is part of our Christian duty,—part of our good fight of faith,—something to be done by the help of the Holy Spirit,—something to be frequently mentioned in our solitary prayers to God. Perhaps those who preach the gospel should more frequently discourse upon such things: perhaps to do so would make what is preached come more home to men's business and bosoms,—and would take away the feeling of unreality,—of being quite away from all con-

nection with our daily work and life,—which characterizes a great deal of even very sound and earnest preaching. Now, my friends, just think: don't you know, perhaps from personal experience, that there is an unhappy disposition in many hearts, to be always dwelling on and brooding over the little worries of life: to be unthankfully and querulously looking away from the hundred kind gifts God has given,—and dwelling upon the crook in the lot,—the little vexation, the little cross, the little mortification,—perhaps the great loss or disappointment,—which it would be far wiser to look away from, and to try to forget. Suppose a man living in a pleasant home, in the midst of a beautiful country. Suppose he has pleasing scenes all round him, wherever he can look; except that in one direction there is a bleak, uninteresting, ugly prospect. Now, what would you think of this man, if he utterly refused to look at the cheerful and beautiful prospects which all around invite his eye, and spent the whole day gazing intently at the one ugly view, and at nothing else? Would you not say the man was mad? And yet, don't you know, that there are hosts of men and women who, in a moral sense, do just that? Hosts of human beings who turn away from the many blessings of their lot, and dwell and brood upon its trials, small and great? Hosts who persistently look away from the numerous pleasant things they might contemplate, and look fixedly and almost constantly

at painful and disagreeable things? How ungrateful to a kind God: how unhappy, how foolish; how detrimental to all that is noble and worthy in our spiritual being; how stunting to our growth in grace! For you know quite well that there is such a thing as fostering a querulous, discontented, unthankful spirit: and there is such a thing as cultivating a humble, trusting, thankful one. To a certain and a great degree, people have this in their own hands. You know there are men and women, who are just like Haman: who keep thinking mainly of the few things they would like which God has denied them; and who never think at all, of the innumerable things they need, which God has given them, and continues to give them day by day; often while these blessings are never remarked, and habitually while the gift is taken without the faintest breath of thankfulness to the great Giver. There are people who do all this constantly: whose whole life is one long, ungrateful grumble: who seem to think that God has some grudge or spite against them: and all this while they are incomparably more favoured by Him than is the vast majority of the race; than are countless millions of immortal beings who deserve at God's hand exactly as much. Indeed, I doubt not you have sometimes thought, that as regards worldly aims, and successes, and advantages, it is often those to whom God has given most, who are most discontented that they do not get more: it is just people like Haman who

have already received worldly blessings by scores and hundreds, who keep up a constant querulous moaning if they are not suffered to get some one thing more: as if the fact that you have already got a vast deal, gave you a right to demand everything. And not to think of others, has not each of you sometimes set your heart on something or other: and because God would not give you *that*, talked and felt as if you were released from all obligation to God at all: forgot entirely the thousand things He daily gives you, in the bitter thought of the one thing He saw meet to deny: saying, in fact, like Haman, "Yet all this availeth me nothing, so long as I don't get that!" My friends, when you feel any tendency to such a mood of heart and mind, let me counsel you to turn the other page: to look how much you get, to think how little you deserve: to remember that we are all poor guilty sinners, meriting nothing at God's hand: to remember that every blessing that comes to us, comes simply and entirely of God's free grace and for Christ's sake: to remember how highly favoured we are above millions of our race. till in shame at our wretched reproduction of the very spirit of that wicked old heathen, we go in penitence to the throne of grace, and pray for the pardon of our ungrateful folly!

One word more of this. I know quite well that any of you who have set your heart on things never to be, and who day by day think to yourselves, though

you have more sense than to collect your acquaintances like Haman and tell them all, that you would be right, that it would be well with you, if you could only get *that*,—any of you who do all this, will not feel that your wrong-doing is so very grievous, after all; and will very likely fancy that it is not a grave enough thing to make matter of daily prayer, and to ask the Holy Spirit to help you to put down. Now, get rid of that idea. Not even the smallest temptation can be resisted in any strength of our own. Not the very least hindrance in our spiritual life is too small a matter to take to God's footstool, and to tell God about, and to make the subject of earnest prayer. I believe there is hardly anything that does more to injure the spiritual life of ordinary Christians, than their getting into their mind some vague impression that it is all quite right to go and ask God's grace in prayer for performing great duties and resisting great temptations; but that really it would be something like profanation to make the lesser vexations and disappointments of life known at God's footstool; and to ask His Spirit to help you to correct a little evil tendency which you think you might really correct yourself. Banish that wrong belief! Fix it in your mind, that there is no duty, however little, which we can do without God's grace; and no temptation, however small, which we can resist without God's grace. And there is nothing whatsoever that interests

you, that is too little to confide to your God, in the solitude of closet prayer.

But I must leave this part of the subject, though its importance and practical value grow upon me so that I could willingly fill my whole sermon with it. And I must just in two sentences name two thoughts suggested by the text, of which very much might be said: much by the moralist, more by the preacher of Christ's Gospel. One is, that in this world there is always something lacking of what we wish: something that detracts from all, even if it do not neutralize all,—in spite of all we can do: it seems to be God's way of equalizing and compensating. We may have known how rank, wealth, princely domains, have been given to one who had day by day to endure such excruciating agony, as really made all these avail him little or nothing. We may have known how vast fortune was given to such as had no one to leave it to or to bless with it: and did but serve to make the cold splendour of a childless home. Then our other thought is, that things rise into importance when we find we cannot get them: things which those who have them hold cheap enough. And oftentimes it is just the thing which human beings think they would have prized and enjoyed most, that God says shall not come to them. Many a person, to-day, is thinking of something and saying inwardly, Well, I do not believe that any human being ever enjoyed *that* as I should enjoy it: while

God is saying to such, You must just live and die without it. And so constantly is this so: so invariably do men miss the aim they valued most; that we may be quite sure God sees that all this is a valuable discipline, leading to precious spiritual ends. It is not an accidental or occasional thing: in all this even we can see that God is pleased to go upon a system.

So, my brethren, by these steps we come to the great lesson which is suggested to us by the contemplation of this whole subject.

God provides and arranges so, that in our earthly lot there is always some lack, some vexation or cross, some bitter drop in the cup. Yet God is kind and good: He does not want merely to make His creatures restless and unhappy. What then? What does He design to teach us by all this? Just the grand all-comprehending lesson, that lies at the foundation of all religion, that this world is not our rest: that it was never intended to be the portion of these never-dying souls: that God wills not we should find what will truly content us, elsewhere than in Himself, as revealed in our Blessed Saviour: that we are no more than strangers and pilgrims on the earth: that we are so made that we never shall know true rest, till our Redeemer gives us the rest He offers to the weary and heavy-laden. And oh, brethren, what a new and solemn meaning is cast upon the hundred little things that vex us,—the little things we must daily see other

than we would wish to have them,—the ever-recurring worry,—the disappointments small and great, beginning from the wet day when we hoped a fair one, up to the great bereavement that crushes the very heart, and the utter frustration of the schemes and purposes of a lifetime;—what a new meaning is cast upon all these, when we think they are all God's discipline to wean us from this world and to make us seek our portion in Himself: all sharp lessons in the hand of the Best Teacher, the Blessed and Holy Spirit, to drill into our reluctant minds a truth we would fain put away from us, that our souls' rest can be nowhere save in our Blessed Redeemer! We see now, my friends, why it pleases God so often to try worthier people than Haman with just Haman's trial: giving them many things indeed,—but denying them just what they would have valued more than all the rest put together. We see now, why in so many cases, that which people think they would prize so much, is firmly denied them; and why that mode of life, that kind of duty, which would have been their very ideal, is a thing which God has said is never to be! It is because if things went with us as we would have them, we should grow so content with this life, so pleased with things as they are,—that we should utterly forget the care of our souls, and of eternity, and of the world beyond the grave. The great thing, after all, that will make us seek our rest, and the portion of our souls, elsewhere, must be

our learning from actual trial, sanctified by God's Spirit, that this is not our rest. It is only through being made to feel the want of something better than we can find here, that we are led heartily to turn to Christ, with the Psalmist's "Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon the earth that I desire beside Thee!"—that we get the will and the grace to obey that far-reaching precept, "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth!"

My friends, that prosperous favourite of royalty, so miserable on that day amid all his prosperity, would probably have told you that he would be right, that all would be well with him,—if you could but take away that calm contemptuous face that looked him through, every time he passed the king's gate. Perhaps there is many a human being, very different from Haman, who feels within himself many defects of character, who discerns in his outward lot much that he would wish other than it is,—and fancies that some one thing would have put him right,—that some one thing would put him right even yet. Perhaps there are some present now, who fancy that, give them just one thing on which they have set their heart, or take away some single fretting vexation; and they would be infinitely better and happier. It is Haman over again. You have many blessings, you think: "but

all this availeth nothing, so long as" God does not give you such a thing more. Probably more people than we should believe, even after considerable experience of this troublesome world, yet cherish, at the bottom of their heart, some vague yet rooted fancy, that there is just one thing that stands between them, and being happy, even here. More abundant means: better health: more success in their vocation: a cheerful home with children's voices: what a change (they think) one of these would make! And perhaps it might be so: there *are* worldly blessings whose savour reaches through all life. But oh, brethren, you are far wrong, if you fancy that any worldly blessing is all your thirsty, craving soul needs. It is not God's purpose that man's soul should be fully satisfied with any created thing! And so we are brought to the memorable words of the great African Bishop, of which I have many times reminded you: "Thou hast made us for Thyself; and our heart is restless till it resteth in Thee!" *

Let me add, ere I close, that we are not able, by ourselves, to make this choice of God for our portion. Gracious as is our kind Saviour's face: manifest as is the insufficiency of worldly things: we shall cleave to the dust still, and hold away from the Redeemer; unless the Blessed Spirit touch our heart, and en-

* St Augustine.

lighten our eyes, and dispose our will, and persuade and enable us to embrace Christ Jesus. Of God's grace is all we are: all we hope for: all we can do. Come and let us ask for it, my friends; and we shall receive it! Grace to lead us to our Blessed Lord at the first; and to keep us His to the end!

XVIII.

THE CHRISTIAN'S FUTURE.

"Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory."—Ps. lxxiii. 24.

I KNOW not if seriously, and constantly, any of us would wish that from some mysterious source, we might obtain a full and true account of all that is to happen to us so long as we remain in this world. Sometimes, I doubt not, we have all earnestly wished that we might lift the dark curtain which hides the future from us; and that we might learn some particulars of the days before us. We have wished to know how some cherished purpose will succeed;—what will be the up-shot of some long-continued exertion;—where our home is to be in the last years or days of life. But I think that on longer thought, we shall come to acquiesce in God's arrangement; and to judge that things are far better as they are. The future, we believe, is mercifully concealed from us. We would not seriously wish to know the history of our future life. We fear that if some supernatural power were now to let us who are here know all that

is to happen to us in even the year that is to come, it would cause us more grief than joy. And if trouble is to come, there is no need to endure it by anticipation. We need not have the dark shadow of approaching sorrow, in addition to sorrow's own darkness when it comes. It will be soon enough then. And if joy shall be our appointed lot, it will come all the pleasanter, if it comes as a glad surprise.

And yet, there is an awful sort of fascination in the thought of our future days. If we could make sure that we should see nothing very dark and dreadful,—no overwhelming bereavement, nor very bitter disappointment, nor very great grief,—we have all of us a lurking desire to know something of what and where we are to be, years hereafter. A sketch of our future life would be welcome: and the Christian has *that* in our text. It is but a sketch, for it goes into no particulars. You could hardly sketch a man's future life more briefly: you could not sketch it more completely. Short as is this scheme of what awaits the believer, everything is included in it. You cannot think of an event which could befal him in life, or death, or eternity, which lies without the range of this all-comprehending verse. It includes life and time: "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel." It includes death and eternity: "And afterward receive me to glory." And there are but life and death: there are but time and eternity. So the humble Christian, amid all his anxious fears and anticipations

for the future, should find a quiet refuge for his spirit here. How safe he is: How safe he should feel;—when he looks up to God, and is privileged with earnest faith to say such words! He wants nothing more. Guidance here: glory hereafter: what can we desire beyond these? Oh brethren, that you and I could appropriate this text as our own! What would we not give, for so ample and complete an assurance of safety amid all that ever can fall out; here, or elsewhere, or hereafter; in life, or death, or immortality! What would we not give, if with the assurance in our hearts that we are saying no more than we have a right to say, we could look up to God, the true, the reconciled, the almighty; and say with simple faith, "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel; and afterward receive me to glory!"

Such is the simple story of the believer's future days. It is very general, as statements must always be when they comprehend a great deal in small compass: but it is round and complete. It is a full sketch. It omits nothing. It may not go into particulars as you might wish, perhaps: but it is the whole world in little. The believer looks forward now, and in this he sums all his future history. And safe in another world he will look back, and in this sum all his past. Believers in heaven may have reached that bright place by a thousand different ways: quietly and tranquilly some,—others over stormy seas and under stormy skies: cheerfully and

hopefully some,—others in doubt and fear to the very last: some from the oriental land and the patriarchal age,—others from the crowded city and the rail-road-divided country of the nineteenth century. But in heaven, they will all be able to tell one story of the how and why of their getting there: there is one comprehensive biography that will suit every redeemed and sanctified spirit: "He guided me by His counsel in life; and afterward received me to glory!"

It should be very profitable and very pleasant to every true believer, to meditate on such a text. May God's Spirit make it both to us at this time. The text divides itself, as we understand it: The believer's life in this world is sketched in the first clause of it; and the second describes what will follow when this life is over.

In the first place, we say that every believer has in the first clause of my text, a sketch and description of all the life that lies before him in this world:—"Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel." And although no particulars are given, yet in these words the believer's life is completely sketched. For the Christian's life ought to be led, leaning on the arm of God: in all things guided by God's wisdom, and sustained by God's strength. Nor is the believer speaking without warrant when he says "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel:" for he can plead the promise "He shall be our Guide even unto death:" and nothing short of the most constant guidance is surely promised in

the Saviour's gracious words to all His people, "Lo, I am with you alway, even to the end of the world." And "Him that cometh to Me," says Jesus, whether it be for pardon, peace, holiness, or guidance, "I will in no wise cast out." What promise of guiding grace is contained in the Redeemer's words, "I am the good Shepherd:" and in the prophet's declaration, "He shall feed His flock like a shepherd: He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom." And how naturally we associate the thought of guidance with the thought of God! The Christian's progress is a "walking with God:" a leaning upon God's arm: a following of Christ. What words are more linked with the earliest remembrances of most of us, than those simple words which not only ask for guidance, but express how much we need it;—"Through each perplexing path of life, our wandering footsteps guide!"

And the Christian feels, more and more with the experience of every year and month and week of his life, how much he needs God's guidance. Every fresh perplexity in which he knows not which way to turn: every fresh trouble into which some hasty word or ill-judged act has brought him: every such thing that comes his way, is something to make him feel how much he needs the guidance of unfailing wisdom and almighty strength. He needs God's guidance, because there will be many times when he will find it very hard to know which way he is to turn, and in

which his own wisdom and prudence would be a poor direction: because there will be many sorrows through which he must pass, in which nothing will comfort like the thought that God's hand has guided him into them, and will guide him through them: because there will be daily duties in which no other arm can support: and many journeys through this wilderness in which it will be such a comfort to have that kind arm to lean on. Nor need we remind you of a dark valley which we must all pass through, in which we can have the society and the direction of no earthly friend: and how happy it will be in the valley of the shadow of death to have our Saviour's guidance there!

Nor is this guidance insufficient. We have seen that it may be had, and that it is needful: let us add that having this, we need nothing more. What Christian is there that would ever be afraid of going wrong, or that would shrink from any path however steep, or from any sorrow however dark, if Christ's visible presence bore him company? Oh how can we by any words express the sense of perfect independence we should have, if we could go forth into the busy world, holding the hand of our beloved Saviour, as He was when He dwelt among men! Surely we should never be afraid of anything, or be grieved at anything, or be perplexed about anything. Wherever we went, we should go with the undoubtful step of one who is sure he is in the way he should be. And surely the Chris-

tian, whose privilege it is to "walk by faith and not by sight," does not need a visible sign of his Redeemer's presence to assure him that his Redeemer has kept that word which promised His presence to His own. He ought to feel, and but for lurking unbelief he would feel, that he is walking by the Saviour's side, and leaning upon His arm.

Thus we have seen that God's guidance is promised: is needful: is sufficient. And now we ask, how is it to be obtained? We have no Oracle to go to and consult, as did the Heathen. We have no Urim and Thummim to look to, as did the Jew. And we have no right to expect to be mysteriously directed by dreams and visions as were the patriarchs, or to be spoken to by voices manifestly divine, as were some among the apostles and the prophets. No: the guidance from above which Christ's people are taught to look for, is something that weaves in, with all the appearance of naturalness and even fortuitousness, with the common course of life and of things. Yet we do not hesitate to say that Christ's people have reason to expect a guidance which is strictly and properly supernatural: that is, which does not arise from the mere ordinary teaching of events and experience, or from the mere ordinary movements of their own minds. They have reason to expect an amount and a kind of direction which men not in Christ will not receive. But even the believer will not obtain this divine direction, unless he seeks it; and

seeks it, too, in the right way. And so, if we ever find a true Christian acting in a way which is manifestly foolish and wrong, we may assume it as certain that he has not sought God's guidance in the right way: and that these ill-advised and erratic movements are what they are, because they are undertaken in his own uncounselled wisdom and unaided strength. And the way, in brief, in which the believer may expect to get God's counsel to direct him, is by praying for it, by looking for it, by waiting for it. And I do most firmly believe, that if any Christian man be involved in a great perplexity, not knowing how to turn or what to do: if he then humbly and sincerely goes to God, and tells Him of all his difficulty and bewilderment, and earnestly asks to be directed what he is to do; and then looks and waits for some indication of God's will: I do most firmly believe that he will get it. There are a hundred ways in which he may do so: a hundred things which have taken the place of the Oracle, the Urim, the Visions and Voices of old: and through which God speaks quite intelligibly and indubitably to the humble upward-looking heart that watches and receives. It may be, —we cannot tell,—by some new light cast upon the subject that perplexes: by the man's being able to look at it in some new point of view, or to discard some mist of bias or prejudice or prepossession that obscured or that warped his vision before: and the perplexed path may thus quite suddenly grow plain:

the entanglement may all at once be unravelled. Or the guidance may even come,—though perhaps we have less right to expect this,—in the form of an actual impulse to some line of conduct,—a force put upon us in a certain direction,—we can hardly tell whence or how: yet which makes us feel, when we look back upon that time, that at some perplexing turn we were somehow guided right, when our first tendency was in a direction which we can now plainly see was wrong. Or perhaps the guidance which God affords in such a case, is by human intervention: He sends us the judicious friend whose kindly counsel tends so much to clear our way before us: and the Christian does not forget that in such a case too it is God that is guiding him: the Christian does not rest upon the secondary cause; but remembers what the world often forgets, that it is God working still, whether He work by human agency, or directly by His own mysterious access to His believing people's hearts. Or it may be that the guidance in perplexity which the Christian asks and receives, is afforded by the course of events: he is in perplexity, and prays for direction, and suddenly or gradually circumstances take a turn which make his duty and interest plain: and following with a thankful heart what may very fitly be called the leadings of providence, he looks up with confiding trust to God, and the utterance of his heart is "Thou hast guided me with Thy counsel." Or perhaps when the believer is perplexed, he comes

in his reading of scripture upon a text which he accepts (and that without anything like superstition) as an admonition from on high: and he does but act reasonably when he does so: for all scripture is profitable for instruction and correction; and the psalmist's experience is the experience of Christ's people still, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet, and a light to my path." And this is so not merely by some text coming home to us with more than ordinary appropriateness to our case, or by such a text being somehow impressed upon our hearts by God's Blessed Spirit: but the whole tenor of God's word is fitted to guide us: by its precepts, its warnings, its threatenings, its examples, its promises: and by all it sets before us in the beautiful yet human character of Him who not only died as our Sacrifice but lived as our Pattern. And when we go on to speak of the Blessed and Holy Spirit of Truth and Light, the Enlightener and Director no less than the Sanctifier and Comforter of Christ's people, we are not speaking of a further Guide, apart from those guiding agencies we have already been thinking of; but rather of Him through whom all these agencies derive their efficacy and vitality. It is the Spirit that "breathes upon the word, and brings the truth to sight," showing us the gracious light of each precept and promise there. It is the Spirit that opens our understanding to understand the scriptures; and teaches us rightly to read the teachings of providence; and rightly to em-

ploy all the means we possess of arriving at the mind and will of God as to what course we ought in any case to take. It is the Spirit who has such access to our souls, that He is able, by gracious influences and suggestions which it passes in most cases our skill to distinguish from the natural operations of our own reason and feeling, not only to enlighten our mind, and thus give us clearer and sounder views of what we ought to do; but also to move our affections and dispose our will, and thus lead us to do it. And while there is no more dreadful thought to the evil man, there is no more delightful thought to the Christian, than that of this strange power of the Holy Spirit to influence the decisions of our will and of our judgment, while yet we shall remain quite satisfied that we are thinking for ourselves and acting according to our own pleasure. To the wicked man it only suggests, that all the time he fancies he is carrying out his own plans, he may be in truth merely accomplishing the course prescribed for him by that God who makes even "the wrath of man to praise him:" that while he fancies he is free to do what he pleases, his freedom is only that of the maniac who is unconscious of his chain: and all the while he is dreaming that the world is all before him where to choose his course, he is in truth but running along the rails laid down for him, and keeping to a track from whence he cannot deviate by a hair's-breadth:—and all this to carry out the plans

of a God he fears and shrinks from; a God who never thanks him for his involuntary obedience; and who will punish him for his permitted sins and crimes. But when the Christian calls to his remembrance this wonderful untraceable power of the Holy Spirit: when the Christian remembers that he is never sure that the judgment he comes to in any case is the result of the processes of human reason, but that it may be made to arise in his mind by the secret working of the Spirit Who comes and goes unseen like the wind: and when the Christian remembers that he cannot know whether the decision he has come to as to any course before him, is the determination of his own will, or the over-ruling of the Holy Ghost: yea, when the Christian remembers that if he has humbly prayed in Christ's name, that the Blessed Spirit may be vouchsafed him to enlighten and direct, he has strong reason to believe that the clear light in which he sees some difficult point, or the undoubting decision he has been brought to as to what it is right he should do in some critical conjuncture, *is* actually the result of that gracious Spirit's secret, untraceable, yet most real and indubitable working: what is all this but something that comes home to him at once as delightful confirmation and gracious explanation of the text, "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel!"

Such, then, are some of the means which God makes use of for the guidance of His people. His

providence, His word, His Spirit, all these are so employed: but to reckon up all the varieties of manner in which our Saviour finds access to His people's hearts to direct them, would require that we should ask all His people to tell us their experience of their God's dealings with them, in thousands and thousands of cases, in thousands and thousands of ways. Let us just settle it in our minds, that it is absolutely certain that if in any perplexity Christ's people take the right way to get Christ's guidance and direction, they will get it, from some quarter or other, in some form or other: and let me recur to the practical question, how this guidance is to be obtained. Truly, like all spiritual blessings, freely and without price, by asking for it in the name of Christ. Prayer is the conductor that leads down all spiritual blessings from heaven to earth: pardon, purity, comfort,—and guidance too. As the Heathen went to his lying oracle: as the Jew went to his Urim and Thummim: as men in the dark ages sought by many superstitious observances to get a supernatural intimation of the turning it behoved them to take; so the Christian goes to the throne of grace. But while he thus, in common with other men, bears his testimony to the great truth, that in many a case we feel we need guidance above that of our own skill, there is this difference, that while worldly men are oftentimes fooled and misled by what they trusted most to, the believer never is. The answer *he* gets

in his perplexity is not the doubtful, ambiguous response of the heathen oracle, that palters in a double sense, and is far more bent upon saving its own credit than upon directing its enquirer: not the superstitious folly of the man who not knowing whether to go to the right or the left, leaves the decision to the cast of a die, or the blind guidance of the moment's impulse: but the sober conviction of one who surely believes that God is pledged to be His people's guide, and that in His own way He will guide them. And as the Christian in his difficulty and uncertainty goes to his heavenly Father, it is as if he said,—I know not which way to go: I am in perplexity: I have no wisdom of my own: but all I desire is to go where Thou wouldst have me: I submit my will to Thine: I plead Thy promise: Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth. Now we firmly hold, that if the believer, in this confiding, teachable spirit, goes to God, and asks for guidance, he will get it: and get it not merely in the decision of weighty questions such as affect the occupations, and character, and scenes of many years. Not only will God guide him when he is considering the sphere in life he is to choose,—his business or profession,—that question which exercises so great an influence upon our lot in time and eternity: Not only will God guide him when he is considering, with many hopes and many fears, whether he shall leave his native land, and away to push his fortune

in some new world across the ocean; or save his home-bred virtues in his parents' lowly lot, and sleep at last in his parents' honoured grave: Not only will God guide him when he is considering whether he shall make the bitter sacrifice to which duty leads him, but which may darken many an after-year: But in the passing perplexities of a common day;—in the question how to employ a vacant hour, or what to say in the interview with some person of no great importance,—yea, what chapter to turn to for the evening portion of edification or comfort, what volume to choose for the Sunday evening reading, what turn to take in the lonely, meditative walk. For if God reckons the very hairs of the believer's head, surely it would be a strange error to think that anything that can befal him is too small to seek God's guidance in, or too small for God to afford it in. And when the Christian rests in the belief, "Thou shall guide me with Thy counsel:" when he prays that God may send forth His light and truth to be his guides: he wishes and he trusts that God will guide him not only to the cross of Christ,—not only to the sense of his sinfulness and woe by nature, and of the Redeemer's grace and power to save,—not only into the church of His own redeemed and sanctified people,—but that God may guide him in the daily cares and walks of daily life,—in every little perplexity, in every thought he thinks, every word he utters. For it is when thoroughly

and in everything guided, and looking to be guided, by God, that the believer is in the best and healthiest frame of spirit. Guided by His counsel, wheresoever we go, whatsoever we do: so we shall always be right, and safe, and happy!

Such, then,—poorly and faintly sketched—such is the Christian's life to be. It will be his own fault if it be not. The channel is buoyed: the path is mapped out: he has but to ask for guidance with a humble heart; and to watch for it with a prudent and ready eye. God has promised to guide him: surely God will never guide him wrong. And surely God, Who "knoweth our frame, and remembereth that we are dust," will never lead him into what will overwhelm his spirit or overtask his strength. A happy course, if we have but faith to trust God; but an end how glorious to finish this happy course! "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel; and *afterward receive me to glory!*" How simply is the end stated! Who would think that the dark and awful stream of death runs between the clauses of this text: *that* is the thing that glory is to come after. And happy as is the first alternative, of life guided by God's counsel, happier far is the other, of glory with God after life is past! For "to depart and be with Christ is far better," than the very happiest life that can be on this side of time. Here it is labour, there it is rest. Here we are strangers and pilgrims, there we are at

home. Here we are sinful, there we shall be made perfect in holiness. Here we suffer pain and sorrow, there shall be no sorrow and no pain. Here we are ever called to fight with temptation, there that weary warfare is done. Here we mourn many hours of darkness, there shall be no more night. Here we are absent from Christ, there we shall be for ever with the Lord. O most happy he who can see in the text, by a realizing faith, the sketch and outline of all his endless life: *He* will never fear at the thought of the unknown Future! But as he looks out upon that shadowy tract, and feels how unreadable it is: as he remembers that he cannot boast of to-morrow, and knows not what a day may bring forth: he falls back upon one great light, and holds by one sure anchor. I know little, indeed, he may say; but I know enough when I know this; that "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel; and afterward receive me to glory!"

Now the God of peace, That brought again from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, through the blood of the everlasting covenant; Make you perfect in every good work to do His will, working in you that which is well-pleasing in His sight, through Jesus Christ: To Whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen.

THE END.

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